APRIL 2025

AUSTRALIA

PLAYBOY

TACKLING TABOO
WITH CARTOONIST ROBERT "BUCK" BROWN

DORIAN ELECTRA'S SOUND REVOLUTION
WHEN MUSIC MEETS IDENTITY

A VISION OF BEAUTY

Jessica Ramirez

SCULPTING SOCIETY
NICK CAVE'S SKILL AND VISUAL ART!

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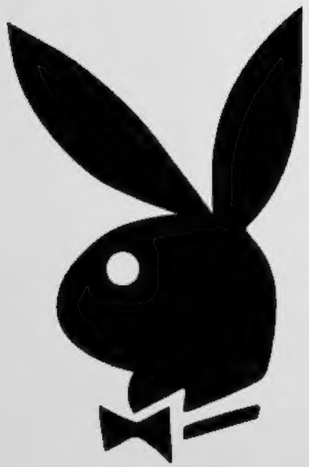

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AUSTRALIA

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naked *defiance*

An artwork created from playboy's pages challenges the idea that nudes exist merely for others' pleasure

BY **SARAH BOXER**

Photomontages are subversive by nature. They're counterfactuals — pictures cut up and rearranged to show things as they are not, things as they *might be*, pictures that pose an anxious question beloved by fantasists, moralists and revolutionaries: *What if?* Objects and bodies are turned on their heads, sometimes figuratively, sometimes literally. Think of the German dadaist Hannah Höch's 1929 photomontage *Fremde Schönheit* (Strange Beauty). Onto a photograph of a reclining nude white female body, Höch planted an oversized image of a carved stone head, along with a pair of eyeglasses and eyes that are, in turn, too large for the head. The nude, familiar to Western eyes, thus has become a jarring hybrid. It's clearly subversive, but what exactly is subverted?

Keep this question in mind as we look at a photomontage with an unusual playboy history: the artwork displayed above. Created by Martha Rosler in the early 1970s, the piece is a subtle and comical work. Rosler, known for her socially biting photography, video and performance pieces, never titled this work, but it now goes by the laughably long name *Body Beautiful, or Beauty Knows No Pain: Hot House, or Harem (After Ingres)*. Snipped from the pages of playboy, these wholesome-looking young women lounge about together wearing nothing, forming a landscape of "alluring mounds of flesh," as Rosler has said. The women in this topography are white, mostly, and topless, all, coyly obscuring their privates in various ways, often while smiling and making eye contact.

These nudes were not always on the same page. They began their public lives separately, representatives in playboy magazines of a certain American ideal of beauty from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s—Connie Kreski, Kathy MacDonald, DeDe Lind and dozens of other models. Some years after publication, when the images had mostly finished out their lives in bathrooms, bedrooms and basements, they found themselves bound up with string and tossed into the garbage. And there they unwittingly began a new existence as part of the feminist revolution.

• • •

In the trash heaps of her New York City apartment building and the town dumps of southern California, Rosler found and rescued these photos from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. What she really dug about these sexpots was what she saw as their "just past" beauty, as she explains in an e-mail. She loved that they occupied "the twilight realm" between being desired and being rejected. By the time she discovered and recovered them, the nudes had been dumped for younger, more contemporary beauties as playboy's primary aesthetic moved from "corn-fed" gals modestly revealing themselves to raunchier, more exposed poses. (The first Centerfold to go full frontal was in January 1972.)

Liberating the semi-nudes from their pages, Rosler rearranged them en masse on a new page for a new life. Like other Rosler photomontages of the early 1970s that juxtapose mismatched images to make a social point (in one work, for instance, a woman calmly vacuums her curtains while outside her window a scene from the Vietnam war unfolds), *Hot House* was clearly subversive. But to get back to our opening question, what does it subvert?

As I see it, in Rosler's hands the *Hot House* panorama of bodies evokes not so much the cozy seductions of playboy itself but something vaguely threatening. As Richard Meyer, an art history professor at Stanford University, notes in "Feminist Art Re-Covered" (his chapter in 2019's *A Companion to Feminist Art*), the playboy figures in Rosler's collage "overproduce female submission to the point where it becomes something like its opposite — a wave of naked defiance" — and also, possibly a picture of female pleasure. That seems to be roughly how Rosler sees this work today too.

"Almost all the women in my photomontage are lying down,

in postures of allure or surrender," Rosler says. But as part of a harem, she notes, "they arguably constitute a woman's domain, a 'heterotopia' carved out at least temporarily from the domination of the master." They're rebellious servants, free and unafraid. Seen this way, the photomontage begins to look like a horizontal riff on Pablo Picasso's famously challenging early cubist painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which features five female nudes aggressively standing and staring down the viewer. Even the colors are similar.

• • •

Throughout the 1970s Rosler kept *Hot House* in her home, only bringing it out as a slide for an occasional lecture. Two decades later, though, her collages began to enter the art market. As Meyer notes, copies of her pieces were no longer "roughand- tumble paste-ups or agitprop flyers" but rather "editioned photographs (which is to say, commodities)." It was at this point that Rosler's playboy photocollage acquired its long name.

Then in 2007 the world was hit upside the head with WACK!, a groundbreaking exhibition of 119 feminist artists. Organized by curator Cornelia Butler, the show opened at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and included plenty of provocative works, including *Hot House* and 30 other Rosler photomontages.

But the big news — and, for some, the big outrage — was the exhibition catalogue's cover design, which features a large detail of Rosler's collage and the words *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* splayed in white, all-caps letters across the mounds of flesh. The meaning of the *Hot House* nudes began to change anew.

Some artists were angry, some puzzled, some tickled. Some viewers worried that the cover seemed to sanction a particular kind of feminism: the branch that has become derogatorily known as "do-me" feminism. Others thought the cover suggested, inaccurately, that the WACK! exhibition focused only on women and their bodies, women as sexual objects and women as sexual beings. Still others complained about the cover's "peep show" aspect. *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter called it "just another sex-sells pitch." Never mind that Rosler's work has always been considered revolutionary, sharply critical of the commodification of women's bodies. Those same bodies — the nudes that had been made for playboy — had once again become hot commodities.

The reaction didn't surprise Rosler. In fact, she remembers warning the catalogue's designer that the cover would trigger a response. But Butler and the WACK! team stood firm behind their decision to feature the playboy nudes. (By the way, the Hugh M. Hefner Foundation happened to be one of several big donors to the exhibit.) Rosler believes the curatorial team's insistence on using her PLAYBOY work was largely based on their conviction that a work of art "made up of a very large number of women, mostly looking at us without shame, is inherently ambiguous. It's 'playful!' and perhaps pleasurable — for women." In other words, there's safety in ambiguity. Well, maybe.

After WACK!'s L.A. opening, several of the exhibition artists went out for dinner, including Mary Beth Edelson, perhaps best known for her 1972 collage *Some Living American Women Artists*, which was included in WACK! In that collage, all the bodies at the table in Da Vinci's *Last Supper* are topped with the heads of female artists (for instance, Georgia O'Keeffe's head appears on Jesus's body).

"We were all euphoric over the exhibition," said Edelson, recalling the night of the WACK! opening in a Clocktower interview with Butler. "Of course the big discussion was the cover.... I mean, some of the women were very polarized about it, just thought it was awful." Others, including Edelson herself, thought it was pretty gutsy. As the evening wore on, someone suggested that Edelson do to the *WACK!* cover what she'd done to *The Last Supper*: paste the faces of feminist artists onto the bodies.

"We just all shrieked with joy," Edelson said.

Then Edelson went to work, gluing cutouts of dozens of feminist artists' faces atop the models' nude bodies. A prominent position was given to Rosler, whose head is planted on the body of September 1967 Playmate Angela Dorian, right above the catalogue's title.

• • •

What kind of subversion is Edelson's radical redo? Is it an act of outrage, sisterhood or something else? Butler, WACK!'s curator, tells me by e-mail that she views Edelson's take as "a love letter to the show and everyone involved." And, she adds, it's also very funny. But Meyer sees it as a more ambivalent gesture, suggesting that although Edelson's collage assembles "a community of feminist artists — and the humor and pleasure they shared," it also signals those artists' anger about "being erased from the cover in favor of eroticized bodies posed for male pleasure." Unlike Rosler's *Hot House*, he notes, Edelson used a "purposeful crudeness" in her cut-and-paste technique, which points to what he calls "the rather different crudeness of the [real] WACK! cover — namely the way in which it presses naked women's bodies into the service of marketing feminist art."

Rosler, for her part, says she finds Edelson's "appropriation of my appropriation...clever...and humorous." This further subversion of the PLAYBOY images, she says, "converts the unnamed young body models of the PLAYBOY endeavor into risky/frisky images of well-known older women artists replacing their anonymity with Personalities."

But wait a second — didn't these models already have personalities? Aren't they still personalities? Is it possible that Edelson, in obscuring their faces, has actually robbed the original models of something they'd managed to hold on to until that point — their very identities?

And now, with this article, the narrative of the nudes evolves once again: They have returned to playboy, from whence they began. Is this yet another radical gesture, and if so, what is its meaning? Well, it just isn't clear. And that's how it has always been. Even now, Rosler says she isn't sure exactly what she had in mind some 48 years ago when she assembled her PLAYBOY nudes. The cutting and positioning of the figures she recalls clearly, but, she says, "I simply have no idea when I thought of doing this photomontage, how long it took me to do it, or why."

So we're back where we started, with the same uneasy question: Why this subversion? What do we gain that wasn't there before in the PLAYBOY nudes? There's no obvious answer, but what jumps out is that after nearly 50 years, after all the cutting and pasting, effacement and rearrangement, one thing remains in its startling quiddity: the bodies themselves, just as fresh, or rather just as "just past" fresh, as they ever were. ■

ANITA PATHAMMAVONG TAPS INTO HER INTUITION —AND YOURS

WRITTEN BY
ANITA PATHAMMAVONG

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
EVAN WOODS

Our March 2020 Playmate, with the help of her mystical cards, is here to offer some much-needed spiritual counsel.

I started reading tarot cards about three years ago. I was going through a breakup and a lot of change was happening in my life, so my friends helped me learn how to do readings for myself. Tarot helped reassure me that things would turn out okay.

Eventually I became interested in oracle cards. Tarot and oracle readings both require you to get in touch with spirituality, but they're actually pretty different. To read tarot you really have to study and master the cards; it's very structured. With oracle cards, there's more room for creative and personalized interpretations. I like both, but I prefer oracle because it's so freewheeling and open-ended.

Whenever I do oracle readings I shuffle the deck and think to myself, What does the person receiving this reading need to get out of it? In a way, it's like being a psychic medium. You're not really reading the person; the cards are. It's your job to relay the messages from the cards to the person receiving them.

Humans are creatures of habit by nature, and it's natural to feel shaken right now. Change is always uncomfortable, but it always has something positive to offer. This quarantine is the perfect opportunity to be still and look inward; oracle cards can help with that. For me, oracle cards help me get in tune with myself and stay grounded. (We also just had a full moon, so it's an ideal time to reset intentions and start fresh.)

Oracle is also easy to learn. Anyone can pick up a deck and explore the cards without any formal training. I've been sheltering in place in New York for a few weeks now, and I've used the opportunity to do readings for myself and friends. I've also gone on Instagram Live a few times to do group readings—including for Playboy!

Right now people are feeling scared and panicked, but we have to remember that we're all in this together. Whether you're quarantined by yourself or with others, try to find new ways to connect with people. Stop and notice your surroundings. Find gratitude.

Anita's Revelation of Wisdom Guide

1. Shuffle the cards and set your intentions. What wisdom are you looking for? What are you struggling with right now?

2. Pick three cards out of the deck. The cards may (literally) jump out at you; other times you might have to use your intuition.

3. The first card you pick is the lesson to be learned. This will help guide you toward the source of your troubles.

4. The second card you pick is how it might be learned. This card can help you understand the situation better.

5. The final card you pick is wisdom revealed. This card helps you connect the dots between all three cards. It tells you how you can overcome a problem in your life and what you can learn from that "problem."

PLAYMATE
OF THE YEAR

Miss FREEDOM

Instagram **@officialfreedommusic**

Photography by **Tre Fuller | @trefuller_**
MUA **Javier Deleon | @upscale_artistry**

PLAYMATE
OF THE YEAR

Such an absolute honor to have you! Playboy South Africa selects FREEDOM for Playmate of the Year 2025! Freedom is a former Hall of Fame Showgirl. Previously, as the Rockstar of Burlesque, her shows became iconic. Recognized as one of the most successful showgirl performers in the last decade, her brand became a powerhouse in nightlife entertainment. Being one of few cabaret performers to break into mainstream entertainment success. She is a PhD candidate (History), while also working at her US-based entertainment consulting agency. You can visit this bunny's latest launch. Hard Luck Woman Record Shop. The boutique record store and tattoo parlor is tucked away in Campbellton, NB Canada. FREEDOM is grit and grace. This beautiful and intelligent entrepreneur owns her nickname, "boss lady" and we are excited to add her to our elite list of Playmates of the Year! Look forward to seeing more of Freedom over the next year. She will be authoring the History. Stripped series which features spicy historically based articles and will be featured in our monthly publication.

What does being Playmate of the Year mean to you? Being recognized as a Playmate of the Year is an incredible opportunity and I feel humbled by the chance to be a part of that list of amazing women. Growing up I collected Playboy memorabilia. I often saw the women of Playboy as this elevated female that was both beautiful and successful. I saw powerful ladies depicted as fine works of art. As a KISS fan, I would be lying if I said its not cool to have an accolade like Shannon Tweed. HA! The women of Playboy are inspiring, and I am still in disbelief of this opportunity.
I was shy and geeky as a young woman. I felt out of place. It took some time to find my harmony and confidence in myself. Once I did, I found my strength. Looking back, I would have never imagined being on the cover of the magazine, let alone with such honors. It feels surreal. I can't thank everyone who helped and supported my dreams enough. I would have never had any of the success I was lucky enough to enjoy in entertainment without such a wonderful fanbase and network of incredible supporters and friends.

Tell us more about your rebrand and what we can look forward to seeing in the future! I began writing poems which later artists began to pull lyrics from. This is how I began as a lyricist. I partnered with artist and producer, Dan Diamond who has had major success with his music and collaborations with Fatboy Slim. We released a single named, Wendy. The single did well on streaming platforms and I began receiving offers to perform live from connections I had built in my previous entertainment career both as a headliner and agent. Following a divorce and a new life mission to seek peace and embrace the simplicity of this world, I rebranded to FREEDOM. My lyrics are stories about life, inspired by the poems I write, in moments where I feel vulnerable. Fans and followers can look forward to seeing more collaborations and exciting projects will continue to emerge. My book releases fall 2025 and that will be exciting for fans and followers. They will get an inside look into my eclectic life and my journey into entertainment.

Are there any qualities or traits you find particularly attractive in a partner? What do you value the most? I enjoy a man who is passionate about something he cares for. He will place the work into whatever that is and I can appreciate my opportunity to admire his efforts. I am a strong woman, but I see no shame in caring for a man with all I have to offer. I think a woman has an important and needed place in a man's life. I believe this brings our world balance. A partner who knows how to recognize and appreciate that is extremely attractive. In a physical way, I look to a man's hands and eyes. I can see his work in his hands and his character in his eyes. I value connection overlooks. We all change appearance in time and connection should be fundamental in choosing a partner.

Who has been your biggest inspiration or role model in your personal or professional life? I have always admired Dolly Parton. I think her comfort with both her sexy nature and exciting personality make her a strong example of what it means to be an independent woman in a world that tries to define the rules of our existence. In my personal life, I found my Grandfather to be one of the most brilliant men I ever knew. His place in my life was fundamental to my growth. Growing up we didn't have a lot, but I watched my grandfather never give up. He was rarely negative about his life, the hardships brought him his resilience. I learned to not give up, watching my grandfather do whatever it took to balance loving to live and working to survive. I always admired his love for my grandmother. His devotion to something he saw the world in and knew was worth it. He never gave up on her the same way he never gave up on me.

What do you enjoy most about your hobbies or interests outside of work? rea y enjoy caring for a home ove to work hard en,oy abor work and the part of iving most peop e have d sconnected themse ves with. I wi wash d shes by hand before us ng a dishwasher and wi pen a etter before writing an emai A my hobbies have become work, and perhaps this is part of why don't fee overwhe med by the number of tasks I take on. When you ove what you do, you do not work. enjoy just sitt ng n s ence, watching the b rds and the things moved by the breeze. am very ow main tenance. easi y find happ ness in a place without a the be s and whist es. ove the chance to share those moments w th peo p e care for a so deep y apprec ate the opportunit es to he p others succeed and grow rea ly enjoy watching peop e accomp ish the r dreams and being able to support others on the r road to success. Many of my hobbies that turned into work have g ven me this chance, n my personal ife it's part of what ove to share.

How do you find a balance between your personal life and your career? Th s is a ways something that takes an active effort. continual y remind myse f that the work we choose is part of what defines our exper ence here .n this time and space. prioritize ove I enjoy experienc ng th s world and ts most s mp est moments. take the t me for the peop e care for the most above a e se protect the things that I va ue and they are not things va ue memories and connections. I have earned that accumu at on is not necessary to ensure that every day is ived to the fu est.

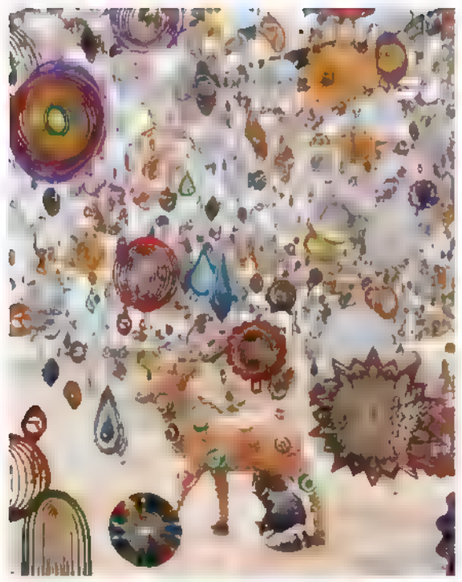
How do you stay motivated and overcome challenges in your work? Running a bus ness, doing research, and hav ng one foot in entertainment al present different pros and cons. have a great network of support have grown the most positive garden and weeded it carefu y. t's the ove and support of others that drives my motivation to keep mov ng forward. Life s hard for a of us sometimes but on y because we al ow it No path is perfect and we have to earn to push through the hard moments. Life itself is qu te beautifu n a its imperfections. When it comes to work ssues, refocus and remember th s, ove my fe and th s moment of d fficu ty w not keep me from enjoying my one chance to grab a th s ving, for a ts worth. We on y ve once. know this is overused, but it's the truth. You have to be brave enough to define who you wi be and how you wi do it. Noth ng s impossb e and when cha enges are faced n work or n our persona ives we have to pick ourse ves up and remember who we are. Embrac ng those who care for us, being gritty enough to say no, and having a heart big enough to be honest without fear that's the path to FREEDOM.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? ook forward to seeing you a nteracting w th me on my soc a media p atforms. nstagram @officia freedommus c or my webs te OfficialFreedomMusic.com. f you are a record col ector and want to check out the "Coo est Shop S nce S ced Bread!" visit hard uckwomanrecords.com or @harduckwom anrecords on nstagram. Support fema e entrepreneurs working hard to bring inno vative smal bus nesses to oca towns and cit es near you. Thank you to the creat ve team behind this project and everyone who continues to support my dreams.

body & soul

With a full slate of 2020 projects, multimedia artist **Nick Cave** reaffirms his dedication to fostering community, speaking truth to power and celebrating our wondrous, vulnerable bodies

BY **OSMAN CAN YEREBAKAN**



Opening page, above and opposite. The mixed media centerpiece of Cave's solo exhibition *Until* at the Momentary, a satellite of Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville, Arkansas, includes millions of plastic pony beads, 16,000 wind spinners, 24 cartridge cases, 7 cast iron lawn jockeys, 13 sequined jackets, more than 10 miles of crystals and one ceramic crocodile.

On a foggy Chicago morning I find myself sweating atop an elliptical in a hotel gym, preparing my questions for Nick Cave. I push and pull the machine's handles as fast as works from Cave's vast repertoire march through my mind. His impossibly intricate *Soundsuit* sculptures dance in full ecstasy, their fringes twirling; the dance party he organized around a mammoth rotating streamer curtain for *The Let Go*, an immersive exhibition that debuted at New York's Park Avenue Armory, reappears in epic radiance.

My visit to the gym before our meeting stems from an urge to project deftness — intellectually and physically — in front of a man whose art has allured, provoked and moved the public for nearly three decades.

At first sight, Cave, 61, radiates controlled dynamism through his sculpted physique and magnetic eye contact. Standing beside him in a room populated with items he has gathered to create new *Soundsuits* — the first in years, he says — I notice a pile of colorful sweaters on an ironing board. Two male mannequins are stationed by a cassette player Cave still uses to switch between tunes according to his mood. He wears an all-black ensemble of sports jersey and skirt, finished with chunky high top sneakers. We proceed to wander through Facility, a multipurpose studio, gallery and private space he shares with his personal and professional partner, graphic designer Bob Faust, and their dog, Bam Bam.

Cave's biggest upcoming project is a restaging of his solo exhibition *Until* at the Momentary, a satellite of Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville, Arkansas, in July. (This follows its debut at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts in the fall of 2016 and adaptations in Sydney and Glasgow.) The show, whose title is an allusion to the legal principle of "innocent until proven guilty," is one of the artist's most direct responses to the country's current ills — in particular its gun policies and racial profiling by law enforcement. Ingrained in Cave's flamboyant visual lexicon is piercing commentary on the urgency of taking a stand, as well as the irreversibility of harm.

He recalls his initial reaction when he heard about Freddie Gray's death in 2015. "I am an artist with civic responsibility, so how do I use the voice I am fortunate to have?" he remembers thinking. Furious, he wondered if racism exists in heaven, a rumination that served as catalyst for Until's installation of acrylic pieces blended with domestic icons of Americana and consumption.

Until consists of a tent stitched out of shoelaces next to acrylic and glass ornaments suspended from the ceiling — a colorful ram of pony beads, dream catchers and drop-shaped decorative pieces the artist collected from shops around the country. Immersing the audience in a kaleidoscopic forest, the arrangement is studded with such alarming details as bullets embedded in wind spinners. From above hangs a mammoth crystal cloud made of 14 layers of materials, including crocheted blankets on the cloud's bottom, hiding beneath its surface like a sea of colors and serving as a reminder of safety. On the outside, lawn jockeys poke their heads among an array of gramophones, porcelain birds and metal lamps.

"The vulnerability is always exposed within the work, one way or the other," says Cave, who spent more than four weeks hand-embellishing the cloud's outer surface for its initial hang at MASS MoCA. Ladders allow the audience to face, up close, details both horrific and mundane. *Hy-Dyve*, an immersive video projection Cave created as part of *Until*, fills a room with images of water rushing beneath viewers' feet while avian and human eyes stare from above the flow. The artist's signature use of movement and gesture through the body echoes in the room-enveloping projection — a hallucinatory commentary on the slave trade and contemporary policing, on American racism then and now.

Bound by *Until*'s sheer physicality, the clashing motifs raise a question: What is this focus on the body that runs so viscerally through Cave's work? The installations darkly beckon, and the *Soundsuits* noisily dance — but where are they leading us?

• • •

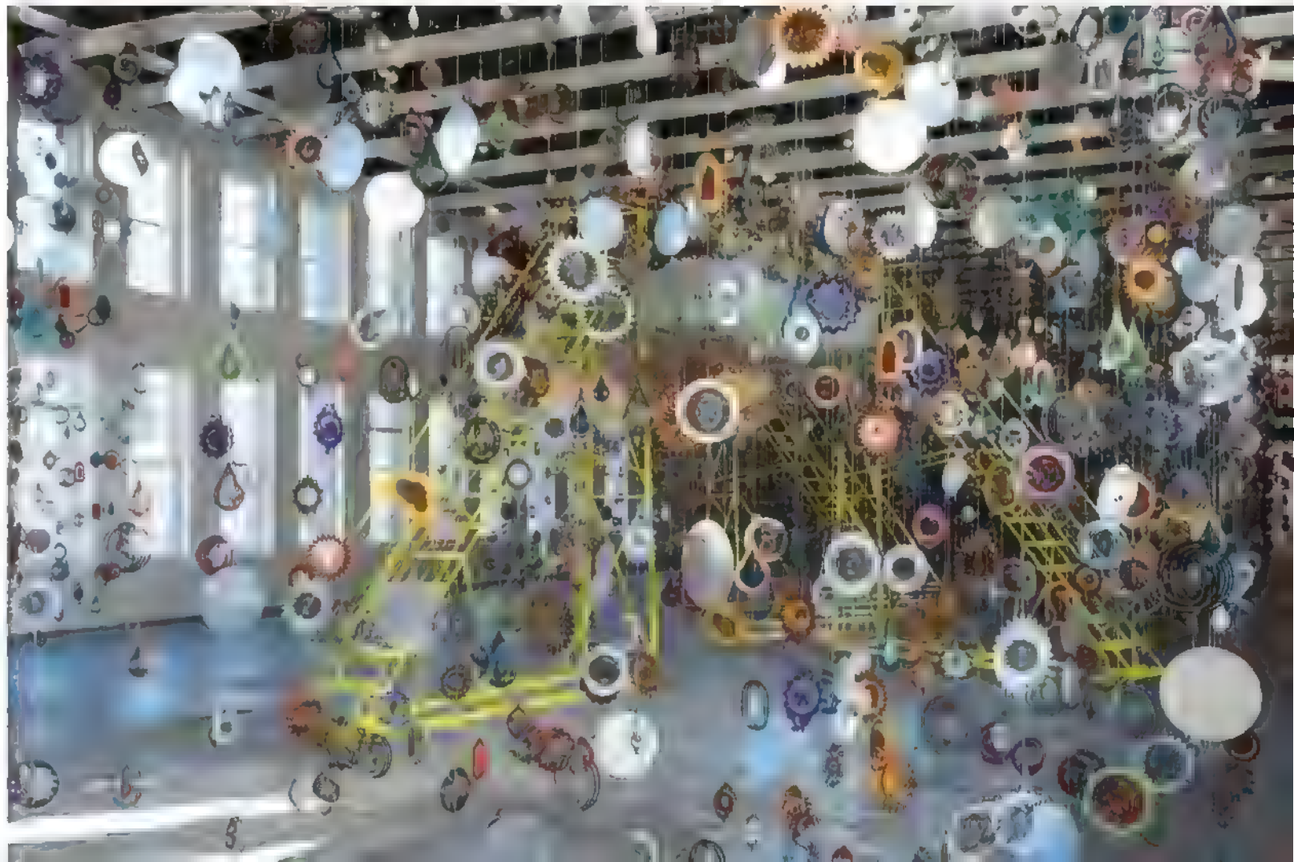
Sea Sick, a piece from his 2014 Made by Whites for Whites exhibition that pairs a racist tchotchke with an architectural composition of seascape paintings, now sits in Cave's living room, where he also displays paintings by contemporary American artists Barkley L. Hendricks and Titus Kaphar. One floor down, six assistants weave beads and sew threads, adjacent to a gallery where Cave and Faust rotate works by established artists such as Jeffrey Gibson and Lynette Yiadom-Boakye, as well as works by emerging names and thrift store finds that spark their interest.

"Nick is a collector at his core, both through sourcing materials for his works and also in his incredibly impressive art collection," says Jack Shainman, who has been showing Cave at his eponymous New York gallery for nearly 15 years. "His dedication to supporting young and emerging artists spans Nick's creative practice, from burgeoning artists, musicians and dancers in his performance pieces to the founding mission behind Facility."

Among his peers, Cave is unique in combining art and other disciplines on a grand scale, weaving together fashion, dance, theater, music and performance while remaining true to his vision as a sculptor. (He even works with text. Made by Whites for Whites included a take-home brochure featuring essays by Henry Louis Gates Jr., David Breslin and more — a rare example of the artist feeling his visual language wasn't enough to express the meaning of his work.)

"I'm creating works that open themselves up to dance or theater, which can function from one extreme to the other, with space always allowing room for it to happen," he explains. His passion for expression through movement entered his system early and never left. After working until the early hours of the day, a college-age Cave would dance away his frustrations at gay clubs close to his studio at the Kansas City Art Institute, where he received his bachelor of fine arts degree in 1982. He would make himself a new piece of clothing each night. "Cruising wasn't really my thing; dancing was how I worked through everything," he says of his early forays into gay life in the late 1970s.

One of six brothers, Cave was born in Fulton, Missouri, in an environment that quickly made him aware of the forces he



Cave made his first Soundsuit from twigs in 1992 in response to the L.A. police beating of Rodney King. Each weighs between 30 and 50 pounds and takes four to six months to construct. The Soundsuits on these pages were created in (from left) 2017, 2015, 2015 and 2016.

would spend much of his life fighting. "Racism and homophobia come in all shapes and forms, but it's about muscling up," he says.

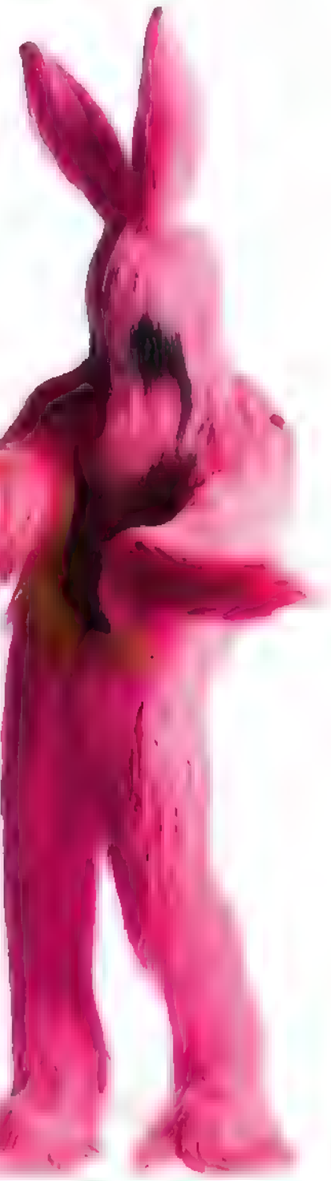
Cave remembers his mother's reaction when he dyed his hair blue in high school. Decades later, color and dance are still big parts of his identity — so much so that in April he's bringing *The Let Go* to Chicago's Navy Pier for a weeklong condensed program with local performers and musicians, free to the public.

His plans for this year also include an exhibition, curated by Faust, in Facility's front windows. It will feature mainly local artists and designers and focus on "voting and voice," two months before the November election. "We have to be positive and keep doing what we can do!" he says. With a laugh, he admits

PHOTOGRAPH BY JAMES IRVINE; PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JACK SHAINMAN GALLERY, NEW YORK

"

It's all fucking drag, honey."



he's disappointed with 2020, which so far does not resemble the space saga he imagined when he was a teenager.

But Cave could change that.

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Another plan for this year is a "next level *Soundsuit*" cast in bronze, 18 feet high and displayed as an outdoor monument.

In 1992 he made his first suit for what would become an army of genderless and nationless aliens invading museums and streets across the globe. The otherworldly sculptures, some of which can be activated by dancers, have become the signature works of Cave's oeuvre, combining all key elements of his practice. They're masterfully beaded and woven textile sculptures, representing the inclusive and celebratory roots of his vision through color, texture and dance. Sounds emanate from the materials, whether they're whirling buttons or the twigs that adorned his very first creation. They give the dancers agency and let them intervene in the space with unapologetic flamboyance. The performers' voiceless anonymity is supplemented by the materials' kinetic sounds, which Cave uses as metaphors for seeing beyond the surface and understanding the essence that constitutes our identities.

When I note the correlation between the *Soundsuits* and drag, he's quick to respond: "It's all fucking drag, honey." Cave sees a clear parallel between performance and our day-to-day rituals of self-expression. "We're all in drag. Every day, we put it on depending on what's coming," he says. He smiles with the wisdom of an artist who remembers wearing a Fiorucci skirt to school and bravely passing a group of teenagers on the street. "I just gained this inner power, keeping it moving and being fabulous."

Today, the same mischievous glee is evident: "I could be in blue jeans from a thrift store, a fabulous little T-shirt and some running sneakers, but I may have on a leather jockstrap!"

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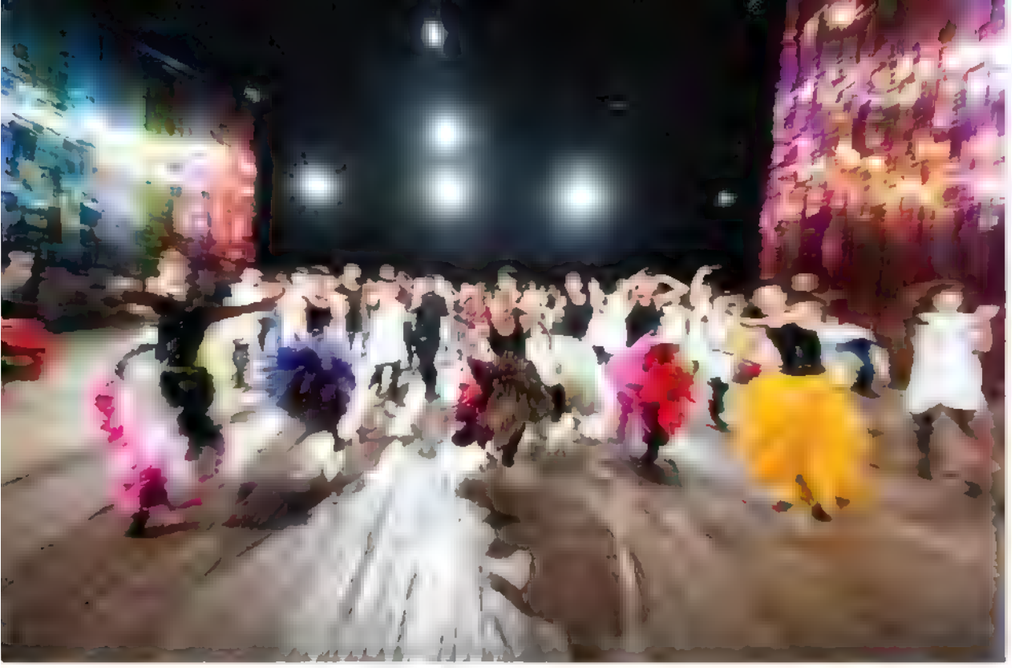
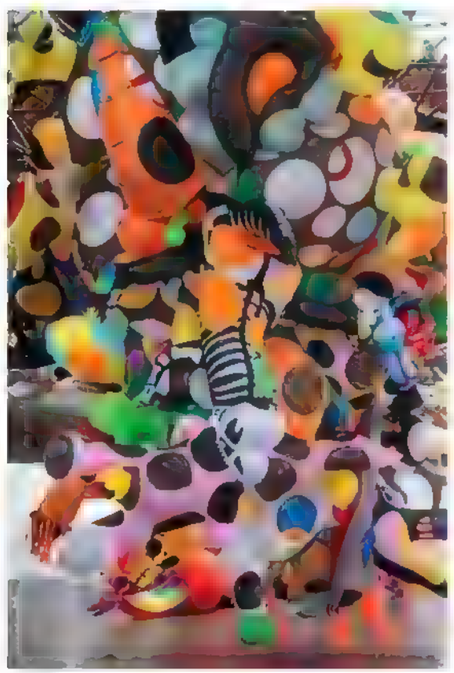
Cave is one of the most community-driven, collaborative artists working today, sharing his platform with everyone from legendary choreographer Bill T. Jones to a local musician in search of a broader audience. He's happy to get out of his own way and allow other experiences to fold into his practice.

Here Hear, a major celebration of Cave's work at suburban Detroit's Cranbrook Art Museum in 2015, manifested his commitment to speech and giving voice to the silent. Returning





Top and above: Previously unpublished scenes from 2018's The Let Go traveling to Chicago in April. **Left:** Previously unpublished image of Alignment, part installation sculpture, part community experience, inspired by the question "What brings you joy?" (On view in Boston through April.)

to the Cranbrook Academy of Art, where he received his master of fine arts degree in 1989, Cave invited hundreds of locals, including LGBTQ youths and students from various art programs, to participate. Over seven months, they collaborated in performances, photo shoots and dance workshops.

"The ingenuity of Nick's practice extends to his strategies for how the artwork operates in the world," says Laura Mott, the museum's senior curator of contemporary art and design. "The resonance of this project has been astounding, from dinner tables to foundation board meetings. It's often cited as the primary example of an artist 'getting it right' in Detroit."

Cave describes his collaborative instinct in typically vivid terms: "You could drop me out of a plane anywhere in the world, and I can make an amazing project. Everybody wants to be acknowledged for what they can bring to the table. How do you give them that permission to stand in the light?"

It's hard to imagine, but at one point Cave himself was not standing in the light. Back in the 1990s he was a creative nomad, launching shows, packing up and moving on to the next venue with no further plans. He was a structured free spirit who trained his voice by remaining steady and consistent. But around 1996 he woke up one day and said, "Now or never." He left an amazing relationship behind and let everything go.

"My life changed overnight," he says. He was "stepping up to fear, to the unknown." During his emerging years, his work had been about following his nose. Once he'd stepped up, his mission became clear: "to remain on the outside, always ready to jump into the center — not the outer edge but into the center." When he jumps back out again, "what I've delivered in the center has to take care of itself."

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These days Cave sits in silence for two hours every night; he says it brings him closer to the truth. Mondays and Thursdays are reserved for his 24 graduate students at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he is a professor of fashion, body and garment.

"Fashion is a form of advertisement that I can make a political statement with," he says, sharing his idea to produce a 10-look collection to follow each of his solo exhibitions, which he would debut during fashion weeks.

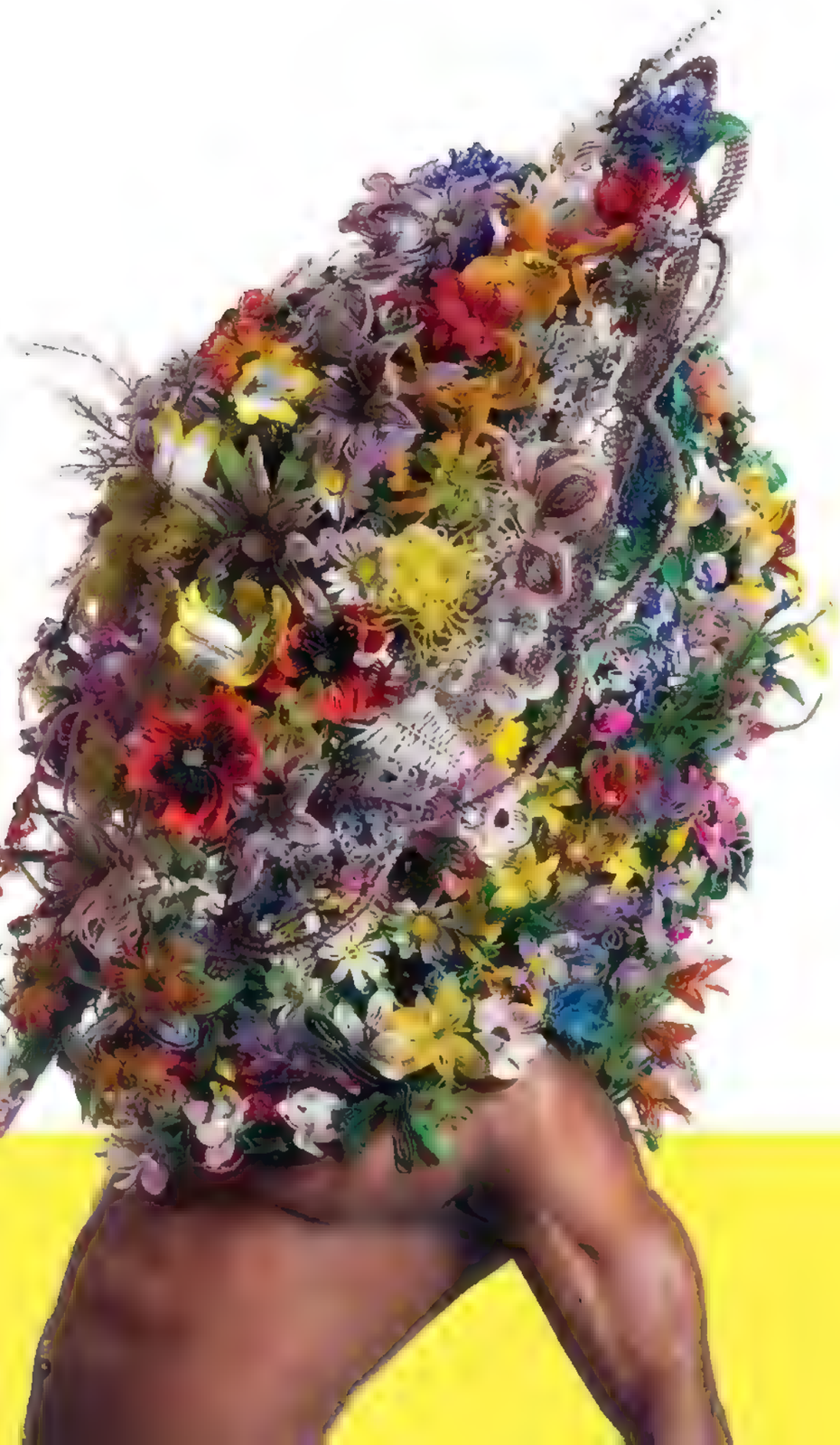
Fashion and garment are manifest in a given Nick Cave piece, but what about what lies beneath them? The body means everything to Cave. It's a tool to experience pain and glory, the good and the bad. It's both a target — as *Until* sharply declares — and an instrument for seduction and sexual desire, most apparent in his wild, balletic *Soundsuits*. But it's more than that.

"The body is the mechanism that grounds us to humanity," he says. He finds drive sexy; motivation turns him on. He sees himself as a messenger delivering deeds to ambassadors, who ensure their urgency is maintained. Once again, he speaks through the body, its power to connect.

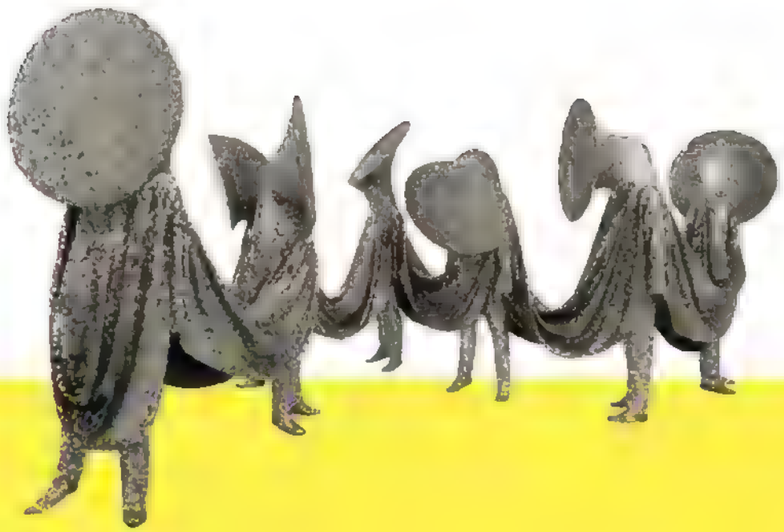
"I am able to use art as a vehicle for change," he says, "but this is bigger than me."

Sea Sick, from the exhibition Made by Whites for Whites, 2014, mixed media including paintings, ceramic containers, cast hands and plastic ship.

I am an artist with civic **responsibility,** so how do I use the voice I am **fortunate** to have?"



Above. Rescue, 2013, mixed media including ceramic birds, metal flowers, ceramic mastiff, vintage settee and light fixture. **Right.** Speak Louder 2, 2011, mixed media including black mother of pearl buttons, embroidery floss, upholstery, metal armature and mannequin. **Opposite:** Soundsuit, 2010



The multimedia artist and pop provocateur continues to fight for erotic liberation—this time with the help of a dexterous sex toy

BY **MARY KATHARINE TRAMONTANA**

A new era for Peaches began with an online review of a men's pale-pink silicone double masturbator she happened upon in January 2019. The multimedia artist, best known for her sexdrenched music, found herself shocked by two facets of the clip

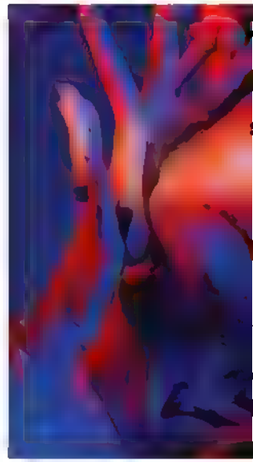
"The first was the look of the object," she says. "It was so disembodied, like 'Danger!' Here's what a woman could be reduced to: a mouth with some red lipstick and a vagina."

Then there was the reviewer himself. "It became clear he'd never had sex with a woman but was projecting that women can't give him what he can get with this toy," she says. "He was talking about having that 'Shut up and suck my cock, bitch' fantasy I felt sorry for him."

Over a flat white at Godshot cafe in Berlin last fall, Peaches recalls pondering the device's features. One end mimics a woman's mouth and the other a vulva, so the toy could theoretically pleasure itself if it had sovereignty over its body. The idea grew. If, in an alternate realm, double masturbators could speak and move, they could "get together, rename themselves and rewrite their own narrative."

That idea became *Whose Jizz Is This?*, a 10,000-square-foot multisensory feat—"a deconstructed musical in 14 scenes," in her words—that debuted last August at Kunstverein in Hamburg, Germany. (There are plans to move the work to North America in the next year.) Jizz tells the story of that imagined universe in which the "Fleshies" come alive and win sexual emancipation. Animatronics, sculptures and film scenes are ignited in intervals by a combination of lights, movement and sound. The project took eight months to execute, with collaborators including experimental musician Black Cracker, technological art hub House of North and (aptly named) fetish design house RubAddiction.

Far away from her brilliantly intense stage persona, Peaches takes a sip of her drink and articulates one of the project's central questions. "Does jizz come only from a male source?"



In one piece, "Cold Turkey," the Fleshies are seen learning about themselves, turning themselves inside out, vibrating on their own without a human's touch. In "Saturnalia Returns," the Fleshies and other sex toys are depicted bonding on a psychedelic journey. Here, the human viewer lies on the floor, taking on a passive role while the Fleshies dominate, mirroring a society with a rigidly enforced active/passive sexual binary.

The lure of masturbators is that they take on the submissive role expected of women without argument; they're always ready and willing to be penetrated, and when they are, their experience doesn't need to be considered. But in *Whose Jizz Is This?* a group of Fleshies unite on a large screen to speak out against their erotic subjugation and share their stories and their dreams.

"I will seek the pleasure of myself. I am deserving of pleasure. I deserve to enjoy sexual experience. I deserve to share my intimacy with whomever I please. I can decide when and how I want to give pleasure. I can decide when and how I want to get pleasure."

A useful mantra for any human who's fed up with being jizzed into without respect or reciprocity.

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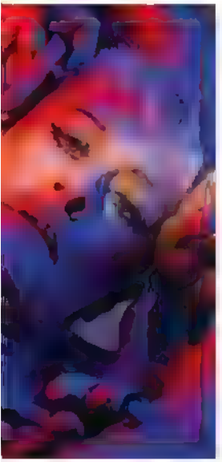
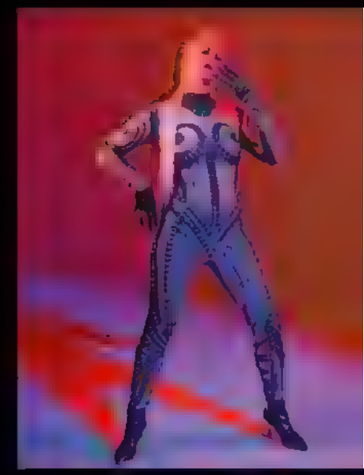
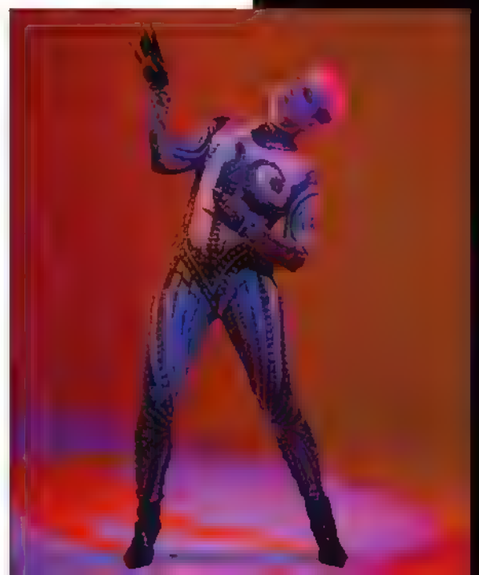
Peaches, born Merrill Nisker, proved her rebellious spirit from a young age.



We need healthy masculinity represented in a way that intersectional feminism and queer culture are going to accept, help and nurture."





As a child in Toronto she refused to bend to authority and disregarded any lesson at her private Jewish school that didn't foster creativity. Theater became a valuable outlet, and after college at York University, she launched a children's drama program at a local YMCA. She was so inspired by the students' ability to abandon inhibitions that she channeled their wild energy into her nighttime performances across Toronto's underground music scene.

At 30, she left Canada for a new turn in Berlin and created the alter ego we've come to know today, inspired by her complex relationship with pop culture and conversations around sex. In 2000 her persona crystallized with her first album, The Teaches of Peaches.

Each of the album's 11 fearless and catchy tracks is a study of gendered sexual politics. "Fuck the Pain Away" employs lo-fi rap beats and a big bass line to deliver the opening: "Suckin' on my titties like you wanted me / Callin' me all the time . . ." The song gained in popularity despite being too raunchy to chart, finding its way into clubs everywhere and Sofia Coppola's Lost in Translation.

"I'm not interested in clean," says Peaches, who has since toured with John Waters and collaborated with Iggy Pop, both icons of depravity.

Twenty years and five studio albums later, the 53-year-old has maintained a linear artistic assault on systemic misogyny. Her latest work is a rallying cry for anyone striving to abandon objectification and be treated as equal to men.

• • •

A pre-liberated Fleshlie, upon close inspection, exemplifies the problematic way we talk about sex. Just as these masturbators were created for men to insert themselves into, we speak of heteronormative human intimacy as the man performing an act that the woman receives. Penises "pound" and "fuck" supposedly passive and vulnerable female orifices. We have countless words for male masturbation, but we struggle to find phrases to mark its female equivalent.

Penises are scarcely featured in Whose Jizz Is This? The absence is conspicuous, a ghostly reminder that modern discussions of sex focus almost entirely on male pleasure. With "Glory Hall," Peaches redirects the focus: This part of the show is an immersive play on the conventional glory hole (an aperture in a wall, just big enough for a penis, so another individual can pleasure the male extremity without face-to-face contact), but the Glory Hall is large enough for individuals to walk through and is lined with 144 Fleshlies.

Learned sexual behaviors perpetuate the orgasm gap, or the decades-persistent finding that men have dramatically more orgasms than women in straight sexual encounters. A 2017 study from the International Academy of Sex Research's Archives of Sexual Behavior reports that 95 percent of heterosexual men almost always reach orgasm during sex, compared with 65 percent of heterosexual women. Additionally, according to sociologist and Occidental College professor Lisa Wade, lesbians and bisexual women orgasm about 83 percent of the time, "or about the same frequency that men who sleep with women enjoy." She also suggests that women orgasm easily and reliably when masturbating.

"There's nothing natural about the orgasm gap, especially given the fact that most women are multi-orgasmic and most men aren't," Wade says. "People are just not choosing activities that produce female orgasm, or not choosing to do them long enough."

This discrepancy in orgasms can be partially explained by

phallic imperatives — gendered sexual scripts that prioritize men's experience and pleasure. A straight man may believe the female orgasm is incidental because vaginal sex is the only "real sex," even though clitoral contact (cunnilingus or rubbing) may be necessary for a woman to orgasm. Of course, stigmatizing female sexuality, enforcing negative body image and socializing girls to please others also contribute to the problem. Pleasure equality, Wade concludes, will never happen without gender equality.

The only path to erotic liberation is to abandon the notion that somebody gets fucked and somebody else does the fucking — consensual kink excluded. Instead, partners must do what the Fleshies do: When one is feeling tortured and in pain (like a featured Fleshie that vomits and bleeds), stand up and say, "I can't take this anymore." Partners must value egalitarian sexual encounters that are about discovery and pleasure rather than achievement or status. We need an entirely new perspective on sex.

Prioritizing women's orgasms by putting the clitoris front and center in our art and culture is an essential part of that transformation — one given new life by Peaches. She takes up space in the male-dominated industries of music, art and theater as "a form of activism that's entertaining and hopefully inspires creativity. I've always said I want the mainstream to come closer to me."

And she's ready to continue pushing boundaries in her fight for our sexual freedom. The stakes are high. "There are more new abortion laws and more trans murders than ever," she says. "We know how to say 'toxic masculinity,' but what does healthy masculinity look like? What does trans masculinity look like? That's not my conversation, but it needs to be a real one. We need healthy masculinity represented in a way that intersectional feminism and queer culture are going to accept, help and nurture."

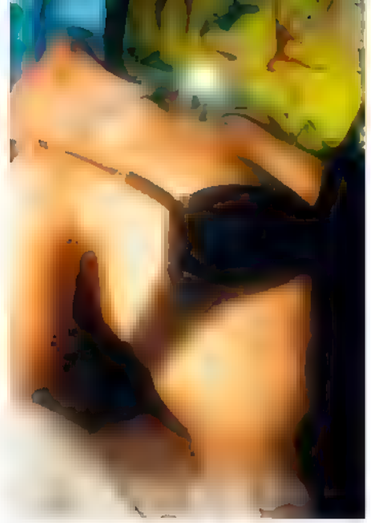
In the meantime, as we usher in a new decade in which we have the chance to liberate our patriarchal sexual landscape, repeat after me, woman-identified and gender-queer readers:

"I will seek the pleasure of myself. I am deserving of pleasure. I can decide when and how I want to give pleasure. I can decide when and how I want to get pleasure." ■

MEET THE LEGENDS FOR GAY(?) PROTEST THAT

Pole-Dancing and *Protest* Go Hand in Hand

PHOTOGRAPHY BY **HADI AFFIF**



From the heart of a diverse, youth-led revolution, Blu Fiefer sings truth to power

BY **KEVIN KNODELL**
KIMBERLY WESTENHISER

It's a chilly December evening, and Blu Fiefer is sitting in a dim, sparsely populated cocktail bar in Beirut's trendy Mar Mikhael neighborhood. Recent economic upheavals have reduced an otherwise thriving nightlife scene to relative quiet—a situation that started well before the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We've all been victims of Lebanon's violent history and the bitter taste it has left in everyone's mouth," says the Lebanese pop artist, reflecting on the wave of popular protest that began last year and the vicious civil war that preceded it. "When the revolution started, the main comment you would hear was 'We don't want another civil war.'"

Fiefer is wearing a turtleneck sweater under an army camouflage jacket. Her fingers are tattooed, adorned with rings and crowned with long, darkly painted nails. She speaks with a latent intensity, but she's approachable and radiates generosity.

The country she calls home is situated between Israel and Syria, and conflicts from both often spill across its borders. Refugees account for almost a quarter of its population. The civil war stretched from 1975 to 1990, pitting religious communities against one another as a mix of militia groups aligned with different factions split the country. Upward of 120,000 people were killed, thousands remain displaced. To this day it occasionally endures flare-ups in political violence.

But Lebanon, and particularly its capital of Beirut, is also known for its raucous nightlife, progressive attitudes and vibrant arts community. Its bars, clubs and performance venues are legendary across the region.

Last fall, the country's wild party culture and rough-and-tumble politics collided. An ailing economy, endemic corruption, cuts in services and rising taxes prompted millions of Lebanese people to take to the streets. It quickly became a broad, youth-led movement as protesters chanted demands for sweeping societal, cultural and political change.

The atmosphere of the protests was a far cry from those happening in other parts of the world. Demonstrators shared public displays of affection, sang, danced and cheered as DJs blasted their sets into the night. Musicians performed on makeshift stages. Expats joked that the protests were better than Coachella.

Fiefer was one of many Lebanese artists who participated, performing in front of a massive crowd of protesters in Beirut. Her set was live-streamed across the country.

Like Lebanon itself, Fiefer's life has been defined by constant transformation.

Born in Mexico to Lebanese and Mexican parents, Fiefer has traveled widely but calls Beirut home. She's reluctant to categorize her music under a single genre, settling on "alternative hip-hop"; to outside ears it's heavily infused with soul, pop and even classical influences. Most of her songs are in English, as she followed her expat father around the globe, it was the language she tended to speak growing up.

Not content with just singing and writing music, Fiefer is an accomplished producer and director—with a passion for pole dancing, which she has incorporated into her act for the past three years, having first explored it while studying music in England. It has become one of her favorite performance elements.

"It's a lot of adrenaline. It's very exciting to do, especially here in Lebanon, and it's interesting to have that conversation with the audience," she says.

Initially she didn't know how the pole-dancing part of her shows would be received, but Lebanese audiences have embraced it. "My specific audience is quite geared toward an open-minded community. I know there's a strong possibility I'll do it in front of the wrong crowd and it will go sour, and I'm prepared for that day."

Pole dancing has become more mainstream as women and enthusiasts of other genders embrace it for fitness. Fiefer is part of a wider community of Lebanese people who have taken it up both for exercise and for artistic expression. But here and elsewhere some get defensive when their hobby is associated with sex work.

"I don't mind exposing myself in that way or wearing high heels on stage while I'm pole dancing, or calling myself a stripper—because I don't think it's a bad thing," says Fiefer. "I think you need to have respect for where it came from and how it got popular, and on the backs of whom. It's okay if you don't want to be a stripper, but show respect."

Those conversations are particularly thorny in Lebanon. In the cultural and artistic landscape of the Arab world, contradictions are common. The Middle East is in many ways deeply conservative, but it also has a history of presenting female artists as objects of desire, which Fiefer believes has made some independent Arab artists hesitant to put those themes front and center as they try to differentiate themselves.

"I don't think there's anything wrong with sexualizing Arab pop; I think the problem is that's all we've had," Fiefer says. "A lot of people would say I've capitalized on my sexuality and my image in my shows. The thing with me is it's just who I am. The whole idea is there's nothing wrong with being sexual. If I want to be sexual on stage I can, and if one day I decide I don't feel like it, I can. It's just the right of having that choice."

For Arab women, pushing sexual boundaries can invite intense scrutiny. The Lebanese government launched an investigation of Olympic skier Jackie Chamoun after outtakes from a calendar photo shoot leaked online showing her topless and wearing a G-string. The brief porn career that made Lebanese-born Mia Khalifa a global sensation also caused a stir in the country as newspapers condemned her for supposedly dishonoring her heritage.

Fiefer herself has occasionally been a target of criticism—and she's never been shy about facing it head-on. At the age of 17, when she performed under the stage name Poly, she appeared on a Lebanese talk show wearing a necklace of condoms as she defiantly advocated for safe sex and LGBTQIA+ rights in the face of a scolding male host. But during the fall and winter of 2019 women in the revolution began chanting against sexual assault and talking about consent.

"I didn't think it would come so soon, actually," says Fiefer. "I think it's a conversation we all have when we're out, when we're having a drink, when we're at home together, but it's not a conversation we have so publicly, on TV or in the streets. So if the revolution stops today, this is a huge milestone."

Women have played a very visible role in the protests across Lebanon. In the beginning, some handed flowers and gave hugs to soldiers and riot police—though others were photographed fighting back when authorities and paramilitaries tried to attack them. As the situation in the streets has become more hostile, women have responded accordingly.

Some Western media outlets treated the participation of women in the protests as an anomaly. But to Fiefer it was obvious women would be central to an Arab revolution.

"A lot of people don't really know much about the Middle East, let alone its women," she says. "I think historically women have been in positions of power but always behind someone, always behind the man. I think with the new generation you're seeing women in roles you haven't specifically seen them in before. It's sparking inspiration in people to be less apologetic and submit less to a certain stereotype."

"It's a beautiful idea; Lebanon is a beautiful idea."

Politicians and businessmen have looted Lebanon's banks to fill offshore accounts; today many Lebanese can't access more than a small amount of their own money. Many of the country's once beautiful beaches are now landfills, and the ones that aren't have been privatized by the ultra wealthy. Last year wildfires destroyed world famous cedar forests while the government made a lackluster firefighting effort. Meanwhile businesses across the country are closing, taxes are rising and nobody knows where their money is going.

When the protests began, artists sought to inspire revolutionary fervor through songs, paintings, graffiti and other media. For Fiefer, this proved to be a creative challenge. "It was actually quite difficult in the first month," she says. "I couldn't even listen to music. Everything felt so superficial. I couldn't relate to anything I would usually listen to because now I'm talking about basic necessities, about country, about life, about the future."

Fiefer's performance before the crowd in Beirut struck a chord. She got requests to do a cross country "Revolution Tour." The tour never happened, but it wasn't long before DJs in other cities started remixing the audio of her performance for protesters in their communities.

Fans tell her she could enjoy greater success beyond Lebanon's borders. She has considered it: Her Mexican passport allows her to travel with greater ease than a Lebanese passport holder. "It's extremely difficult to make it here. It's extremely difficult to live here, yet everyone who leaves is nostalgic to come back," she says. "All the Lebanese who leave become even more Lebanese abroad than they are here."

She pauses before adding, "It's a beautiful idea; Lebanon is a beautiful idea."

Lately Fiefer has been writing more songs in Arabic; she performed one at the protests. She admits she never thought Arabic would become an important part of her music. It was something she associated with the oppression and war her family had tried to leave behind.

"As I get older I'm redefining what it means to me, and the people around me are redefining what it means to me," she says. "It doesn't mean what I used to fear it meant. I can make it what I want."

Fiefer also wants to use more Spanish in her work, to pay tribute to the Mexican side of her family. "I've always felt very lost. When I'm in Mexico I'm a foreigner, when I'm in Lebanon I'm a foreigner," she says. "There are millions of people around the world who feel the same because they had to leave where they're from, and I think I have a connection with those people."

In many ways she's still working out how to reconcile activism, citizenship and class consciousness with her own creative journey. "Being extravagant as I usually am feels insensitive, because I've been on the streets and I've seen how much people have," she says. "I'm not from a wealthy family, but I know the impression I might give out. I'm finding it very difficult to exist right now."

"It took me a good 40 days to put my rings back on," she adds, flashing her fingers. "And they're not even real diamonds—but it just didn't feel right in the beginning. Hopefully I'll get to a point soon where I can feel comfortable as both a citizen and an artist."

When the pandemic struck the Middle East, Fiefer had to make the difficult decision to cancel upcoming shows and start urging fans to stay home.

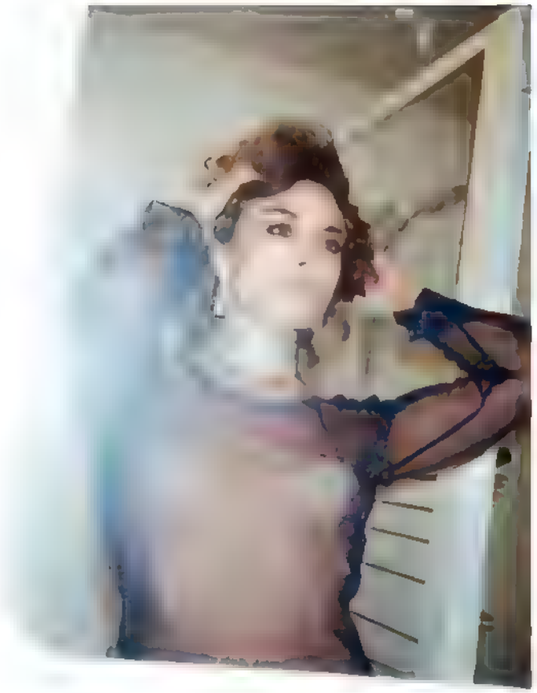
Prior to COVID-19's arrival in the region, divisions had started to show among the protesters. Activists accused the various political factions of trying to divide them and incite conflict. The economic collapse and rampant unemployment led to a rash of suicides last year. Many Lebanese political leaders seemed to hope they could wait out the protests—that a combination of time and inclement weather would eventually cause the protesters to tire and give up. But the country's economy continued to tank, and Lebanese people stayed angry.

Sporadic clashes between Lebanese citizens and authorities have already resumed as people on both sides struggle to pay for food and basic goods. Some activists have called for comrades in possession of masks and gloves to return to the streets, practicing social distancing while standing firm on their social and political demands.

"If things stop being peaceful, it's not our fault at all," says Fiefer. "If things go sour, you're asking for it, because you're giving people no choice."

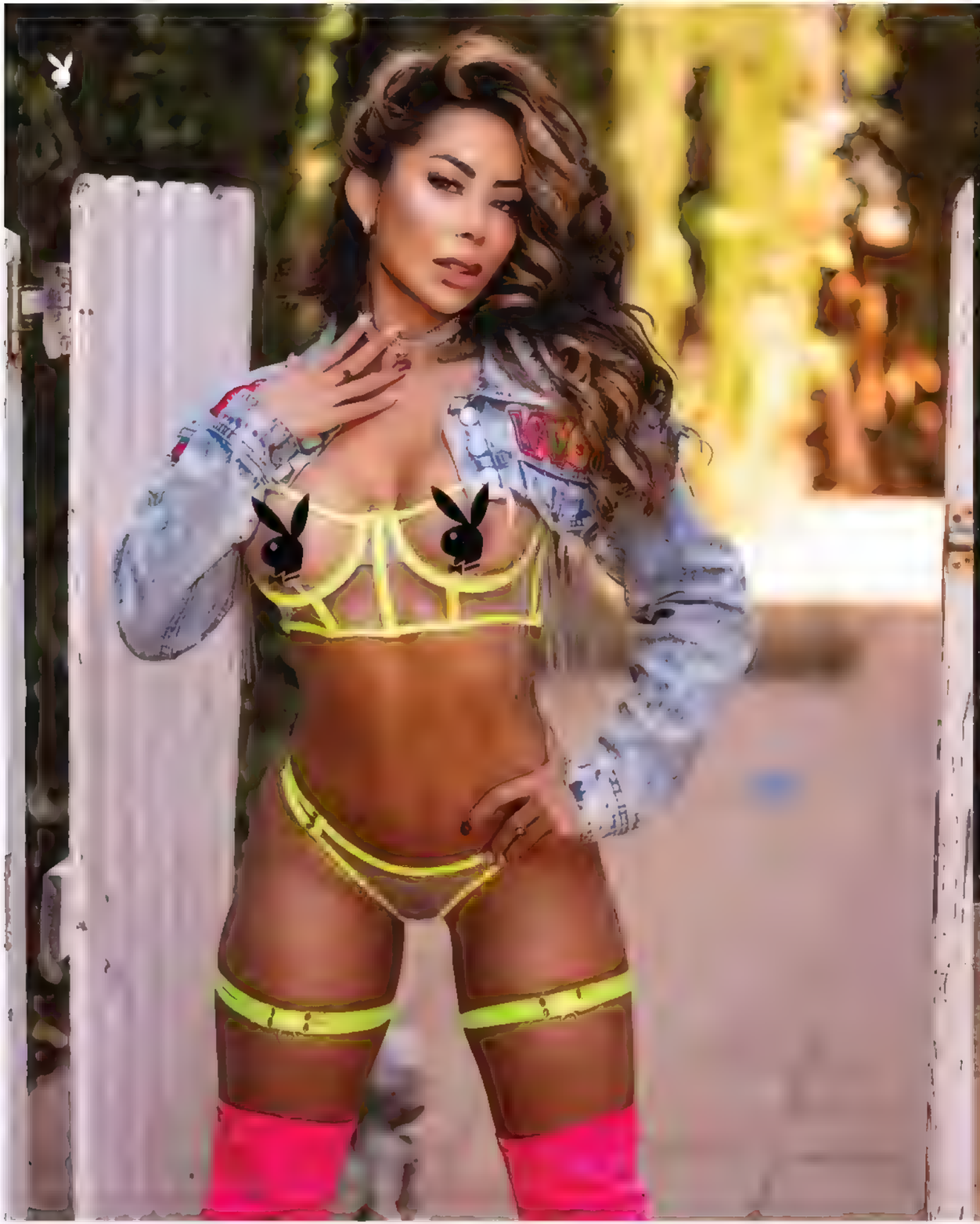
When people do leave their homes again, they likely won't accept a return to business as usual.

"The fact that people made us feel like our demands might be attainable has been very dangerous to the power," Fiefer says. "There's no going back." ■



LOVE
Jessica Ramirez

GIRL POWER



Such an absolute honor to have you! The honor is mine! Thank you for the opportunity

How do you like to begin your day? I start my day by meditating and then listening to positive affirmations After that, ook in the mirror and say: "Mirror, mirror, who is the most beautiful in this world?" And always answer: "You, B, you are the most beautiful in this world." I also enjoy taking baths with flowers, honey, herbs, and crystals like amethyst and rose quartz to elevate my energy and connect with myself

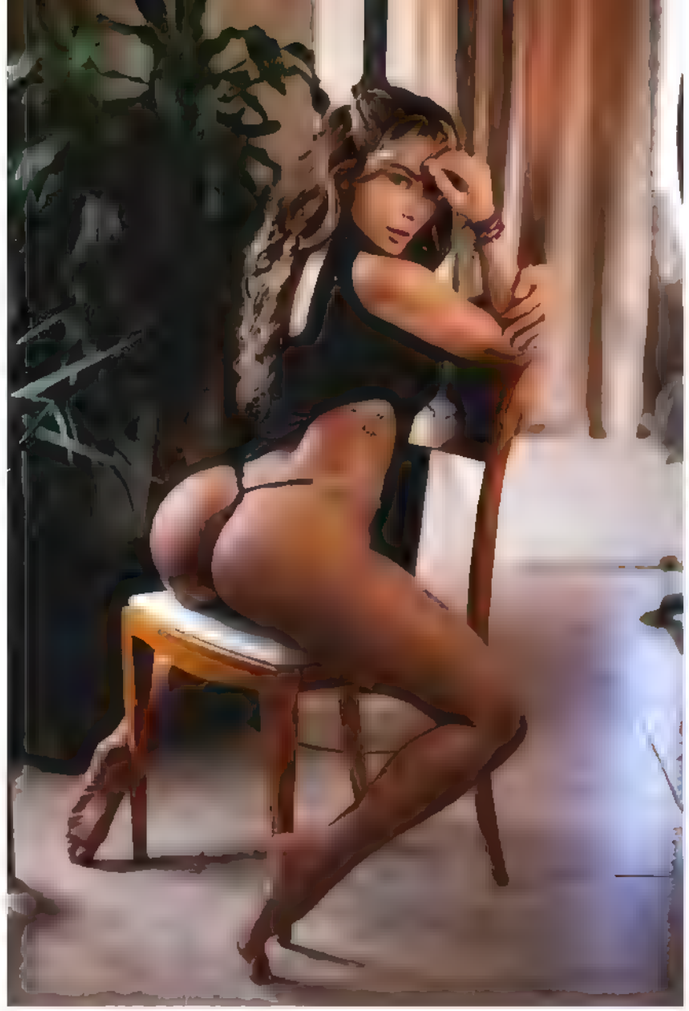
What's the most exciting hobby or interest you've pursued recently, and how did you get into it? Recently, started practicing Pilates, and love how it helps me connect with my body in a more conscious and fluid way. I was drawn to it because it perfectly complements my training, and I enjoy new challenges

If you could spend a day doing anything you wanted, what would your ideal day look like? My ideal day would start by waking up in a place surrounded by nature and a turquoise ocean Then, a meditation session, a good workout while drinking coconut water, and time to read and write would spend the rest of the day exploring a new place, enjoying art, and gastronomy, and immersing myself in the local culture

What's a project or goal you're currently working on that you're really excited about? One of my biggest dreams is to materialize my image gallery and my books It's a future project, but I am certain it will become a reality

What's the most memorable date you've ever been on, and what made it stand out? The most memorable dates for me are the ones that flow naturally. A walk by the sea, a dinner with great conversation, a delicious glass of red wine, or even sharing music like a live opera performance or a piano concert makes the moment truly magical

Are there any qualities or traits you find particularly attractive in a partner? What do you value the most? I am drawn to sensitivity, intelligence, and passion for life value someone who has depth, and who sees the world with wonder. For me, the man represents the protector and provider, while the woman is his refuge, his home the beauty that nurtures and brings life to his world They complement each other in a relationship of mutual respect, where



each role is deeply honored. The man is the king, but the woman as his queen, has the power to transform and fill his life with light and meaning

Who has been your biggest inspiration or role model in your personal or professional life? My inspiration comes from my teacher Lama Ole Nydahl, and also find inspiration in great philosophers thinkers, and artists like Conny Méndez, Carl Jung, Joe Dispenza, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Plato, Siddhartha Gautama, Jesus, and many more. Each one, in their own way, has influenced my view of life, thought, and spirituality

What do you enjoy most about your hobbies or interests outside of work? I enjoy the feeling of discovery and connection Reading expands my mind, traveling allows me to explore new universes, music takes me to other dimensions, and training keeps me feminine and sexy. Everything I do helps me explore different dimensions of my life

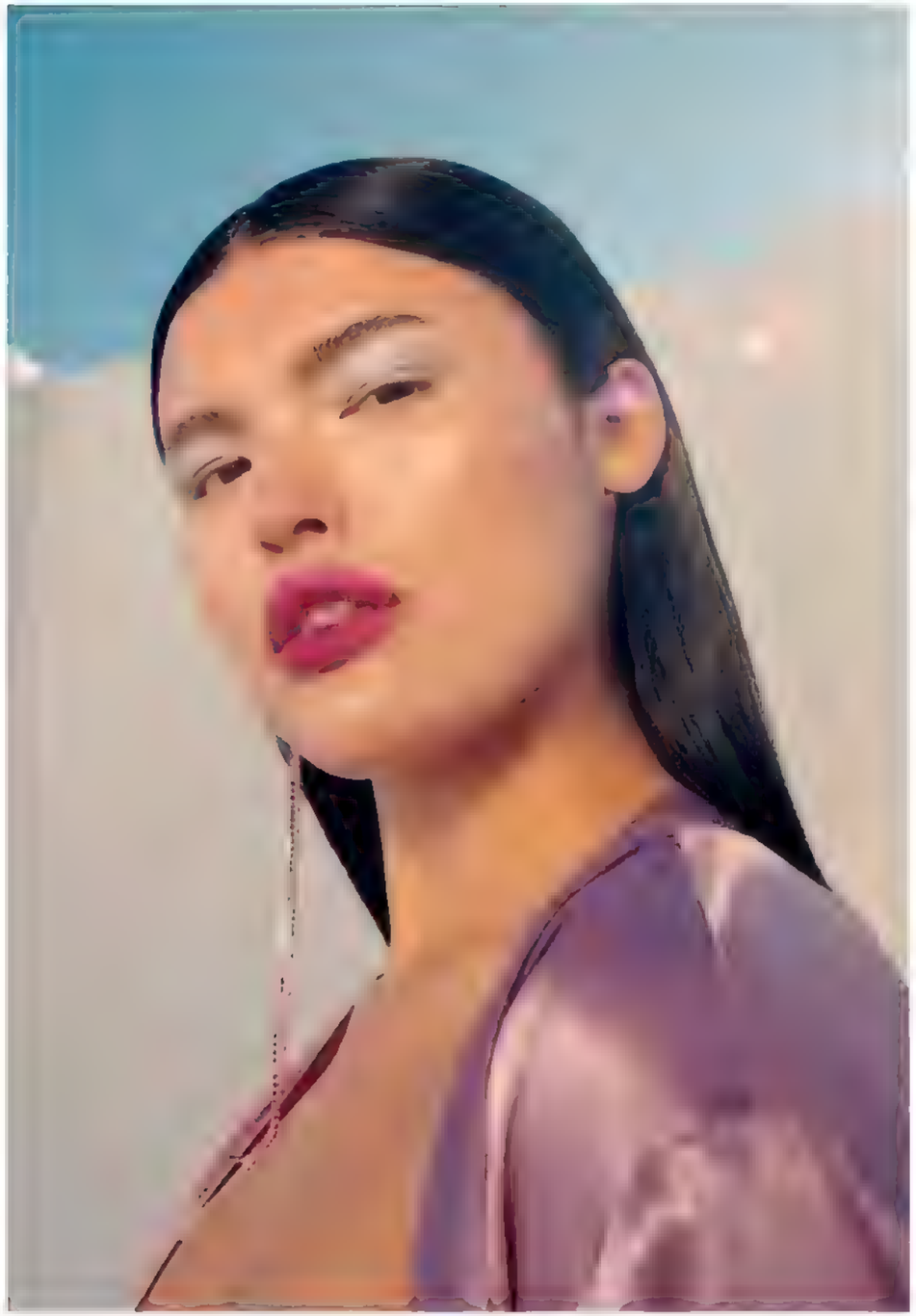
How do you find a balance between your personal life and your career? For me, balance is an art. I listen to my body and intuition, allow myself to rest, nourish my body properly, and maintain my daily meditation practice I have even meditated for 14 hours straight

How do you stay motivated and overcome challenges in your work? Motivation comes from having a clear purpose. I know that every challenge is part of the journey, and I trust that what I am building has a greater meaning

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? You can follow me on Instagram, where I share my passions: travel, art, wellness, and reflections on life. See you there.

THE EMPATH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
SASHA SAMSONOVA



There are billions of people on this Earth but only one **Alicia Loraina Olivas**—and our June Playmate is on a mission to celebrate the unique beauty of every last one of us

"Alicia, you're amazing."

I was at a shoot the other day and had to stop, look in the mirror and remind myself of this fact. For most of my life I've been on a journey to find peace with who I am. I'm in an amazing place now, but it hasn't been easy.

Growing up, I got picked on a lot for being overweight. I would come home from school and cry because I wanted to be skinny so I could fit in with everyone else. In middle school I swung between wearing shirt girdles and eating my younger sister's birthday cake out of the trash. Eventually I thought, *Okay, girlfriend, something's got to change, you can't keep living your life like this.* The pressure of wanting to fit in, to be liked and wanted, was just too much.

When I changed schools halfway through middle school, I began to let my personality shine through. I made some friends and gradually realized my weight didn't matter to anyone. When I turned 16 I started making healthier lifestyle decisions — but not because I wanted to fit in or lose weight. Being unhealthy made me depressed, and changing my lifestyle helped me find confidence and happiness. It finally clicked. It was never about getting other people to like me; it was always about me loving myself.

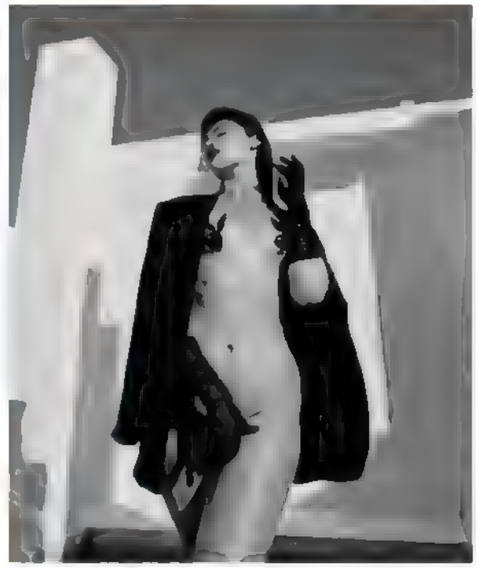
I now believe I was meant to go through those struggles so I could share my story and help others. I have a deep sense of empathy ingrained in me. I feel like a sponge a lot of the time, always picking up on people's energy and learning from them.

That's part of what drew me to pursue a degree in social anthropology (which, simply put, is the study of human societies and their development over time). People have always intrigued me—the way they feel, think, react to one another. The estimated world population is about 7.7 billion people, and not one single individual is the same as another. Each of our voices is important. We should spend more time listening and less time judging each other based on our exteriors.

Of course I'm very passionate about modeling. I've had a lot of exciting opportunities over the past few years, but being a Playmate is by far the highlight of my career thus far. I'm the only person in the world who gets the honor of being the June 2020 Playmate, and that's special. This is the first time I've ever posed nude, but I find that doing anything for the first time is exciting, and I like to live life with no regrets!

Going into the shoot I felt some natural insecurities creep in, and I couldn't help wondering how my body would be perceived by the world. I had to look in the mirror and remind myself how beautiful I am just the way I am — model, student and activist; a woman of Mexican, Spanish, Irish, French and Native American descent; a force to be reckoned with. During the shoot all the love I've kindled within myself came shining through.

I wouldn't be where I am today, standing proud as the June 2020 Playmate, if I hadn't learned the power of self-love. You can't love other people and put love back into the world until you love yourself.



ARTWORK BY **ALPHACHANNELING**

PLAYBOY ADVISOR

Ian Kerner brings his expertise as a Ph.D, LMFT, psychotherapist and author of the best selling *She Comes First* to tackle a range of sexual dilemmas, from STI fears to sexting etiquette. First up: advice on an underreported problem plaguing the sex lives of almost one in three men.

Q: *I'm a 33-year-old straight man, and my problem goes all the way back to when I lost my virginity at 14. I'm sure I wasn't the only high school freshman who climaxed the second a girl touched his dick, but premature ejaculation has hounded me ever since. I've had three long-term girlfriends, and with each of them I've gradually been able to last longer than 30 seconds—but even then my entire sexual ride consists of worrying the big O is coming too fast. After my last relationship ended, I got on the apps for a while but promptly gave up, the embarrassment was too much. It didn't seem to matter whether I'd been drinking or not, whether it was morning, day or night or whether I was mildly or extremely attracted to the woman. At this point I'm ready to ditch sex altogether and stick to masturbating, at least then no one else will know how quick it's over. What's wrong with me? M.R.*

A: Above all, know that you're not alone. Premature ejaculation, or PE, affects at least 30 percent of men. In my clinical experience, guys with PE are no different from guys who don't have it in terms of masturbation style, porn use, family background, sexual history or mental health, meaning PE is something you were likely born with. But that doesn't take away from the embarrassment you feel. Here are a few suggestions (including one you can try as soon as you finish this article) that will help you have longer and less fraught sexual experiences.

The first is a masturbation exercise. Edging, also known as the male multipleorgasm technique, can bridge the gap between masturbation and intercourse. The idea is to identify your point of ejaculatory inevitability—that first contraction of an orgasm—and interrupt it before you go over the edge. When you feel an orgasm coming on, stop! This releases blood from the penis, which in turn cycles the process back a bit, giving you a longer pre-orgasm interval. Try doing this with the help of some new, extra-hot porn. By approximating the intensity of a one-on-one sexual encounter, you're more likely to be ready for your next partner.

When you're with that next partner, shift the emphasis away from your penis. Even without PE, there's a big orgasm gap between men and women due to factors such as their arousal times, and there's no way a man with untreated PE can get a woman all the way there. Become an expert at oral sex and manual stimulation. Incorporate sex toys. Use your words. Create fantasies. Do whatever you can either to make your partner orgasm first or to get her right to the edge so you can climax together. (Another tip: Numbing sprays like Promescent can delay orgasm by desensitizing the penis. They're not a total solution but worth a shot.)

The next line of intervention is an SSRI, a common class of anti-anxiety medication with the side effect of delayed ejaculation. It might make sense to talk to your doctor about a low dose, particularly if your anxiety and depression around PE are intense. It's not a panacea, but it can be part of the solution—and there should be no stigma attached to SSRI use.

Dealing with PE is complicated, and managing it takes real effort. The good news is that with a little work you'll likely see a big payoff. So don't give up till you've experimented with multiple approaches. And when you're back in the game, remember that lasting longer doesn't mean your partner will inevitably go straight to pleasure town. Instead of thinking about how long you last, ask yourself, How do I become an arousal-generating person?

Q: *I'm an 18-year-old straight woman who has been seeing the same guy for months—but I've never finished when we have sex. When we use toys I become self-conscious and can't climax even though I use the same things when I'm by myself. At this point I feel pressure to achieve orgasm just because it's been so long. How can I overcome my stage fright? J.A.*

A: Orgasms between partners can be inconsistent or even nonexistent in ways that aren't true of self-stimulation. What do you think it is about sex with your boyfriend that makes it so difficult? Could it be a lack of clitoral stimulation? Not enough foreplay? Something about the environment that makes it difficult to relax? Certainly worrying about your orgasm doesn't help, as any form of anxiety during sex is a major arousal inhibitor.

If you're not already talking about this with your boyfriend, you should be. He should know that orgasm doesn't have to be the destination during sex; there are lots of other parts of the journey, and you should be getting the most out of them. I would also ask you to think about the parts of sex you really enjoy. Is it the kissing, the touching, maybe giving him pleasure? For the time being, see if you can create a sex menu that doesn't include orgasm but allows you to enjoy other dishes that may be just as delicious.

I would also encourage you to add some psychological stimulation. By this I mean fantasizing together, watching couples

Instead of thinking about how long you last, ask yourself, How do I become an arousal-generating person?

porn, listening to an erotic podcast. The brain is our most powerful sex organ, and it has the ability to turn us on and off. Right now the anxiety is turning you off, so I want you to fill your head with stimulation that turns you on.

Q: *I'm an 18-year-old male who's never had sex because I m afraid of getting an STI. How can I get over my fear? W.R.*

A: Fear is the key word here. It's impossible to have totally safe sex, but you can consis ently have safer sex — and a little bit of that fear of yours, ba.anced with your passion and enthusiasm, can make you a great lover.

With an appropriate amount of fear, you'll be motivated to always use a condom when having intercourse. A little fear can also in spire you to avoid making sexual decisions while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, which of course can lead to reckless choices. And your fear will, I hope, inspire you to read up on STIs. I recommend Columbia Univer sity's Go Ask Alice website and that of the American Sexual Health Association.

If you've ever had oral sex you should get tested just to know you have a clean slate. If you haven't gotten an HPV vaccine yet, you can do both at the same time. Some STIs are symptomless, when you've been tested yourself it's easier to ask a potential partner if they've been tested. If you're serious about someone and think you may want to see them again, you can start with less risky behaviors, such as kissing and manual stimulation of the genitals, and wait until your partner has been tested to move to riskier behaviors such as oral sex and intercourse. There's nothing wrong with taking the slow route: It allows more time for passion to percolate. Believe it or not, safe sex can be hot sex.

Q: *My boyfriend has a lower libido than I do. I want him to pursue me — I rarely enjoy be ing the aggressor — but he's happy to have sex once a week or less. How do we reconcile our differences? G.P.*

A: Low desire is common in both women and men, but somet.mes men have to live with the pressure of feeling they should be walk ing hard ons. It's also possible your boyfriend experiences anxiety around the discrepancy in your libidos.

All of which is totally natural. Maybe you're able to have what's known as "spon taneous desire," in that you can experience a sexual cue and get turned on quickly, and maybe your boyfriend has "responsive de sire," meaning he has to bu.ld on sexual cues to experience desire. Desire isn't the first thing he experiences, it occurs once he's somewhat aroused. If that's the case, you may have to change how you think about sex. Your spontaneous desire may have to be the kin dling to get him fired up, and his sense of pas sion or aggression or whatever it is that you crave may have to come a bit later.

See if you can create erotic sparks outside the bedroom and decouple those sparks from any pressure or invitation to have sex. If you usually have sex on the weekend, make a rule that Monday through Friday is an erotic spark zone where you can engage in small bursts of sexual and erotic connection without feeling they have to lead to sex. Whatever you do, remember that desire, like the stock market, goes up and down and that countless vari ables can affect libido: stress, mood, lifestyle, health, medications, body image — you name it. Go easy on yourself and your boyfriend as you seek that sweet spot.

Q: *I recently got out of a toxic relationship that was on and off for about three years. For the first time in what feels like forever I'm happy and at peace. That said, I'm finding it hard to put myself out there again. This is made extremely difficult by how horny I am! Considering sex is pretty much all I think about now, do you have any tips on how a straight woman in her early 20s can get back to dating — and banging? H.G.*

A: Congratulations on getting out of an un healthy relationship. Now you can focus on living a healthy life — which, yes, includes sex. Of course a difficult relationship will chip away at your self esteem, and getting back into the swing of sex and relationships can be nerve-racking. So give yourself some time to get the lay of the land.

I hear that you're horny, but what kind of sex are you looking to have? Some fun, no-strings-attached sex, something more rela tional or something in between, like a friend with benefits? I think it's important to get in touch with your sexual self before rushing into the actual deed. Start noticing who and what turns you on, what makes you feel sexy and alive.

From there, let the world know you're seeking and that you spent too much time with your gaze focused on the relationship. Connect with people who make you feel good about yourself, and know that you're in charge. You can go out on a date, you can flirt, you can fool around — and you can say no at any point. The sexual brain has two sys tems that operate at once: a sexual excitation system and a sexual inhibition system. It's called the dualcontrol system, and my col league Emily Nagoski, author of the terrific book Come As You Are, compares it to a car. Your sexual accelerator needs to rev up, but you also have a brake you can step on at any time. So get out there and take a joyride.

And because you're so horny, I hope you're masturbating. The past three years have been a golden age in vibrator design, so start giving yourself the pleasure you crave and deserve.

Q: *I'm a bi woman in her early 20s. My 35-year-old partner of six years told me in an argument that we don't have sex anymore be cause he's no longer attracted to me since I gained weight. He has apologized several times and tells me how beautiful I am daily, but I have a hard time believing him. We've started having sex again, but it's awkward. I don't want him to see my body, and he's afraid he'll somehow hurt my (admittedly sensitive) feelings again. This makes our sex passive and cautious. How do we work through it? E.W.*

A: People say shitty things to each other when they argue and tend to focus on faults. It's great that he apologized, but I understand you still feel hurt by his comments. Sexual self esteem can be hard to hold on to. The reality is that we all age, our bodies change, our weight goes up and down, and somehow we have to keep navi gating a world that celebrates youth, thinness and unrealistic ideals of perfection.

I know he's repeatedly told you he's sorry and thinks you're beautiful, but have you been able to have a conversation that goes beyond apologies and reassurances? Have you been able to say that you want to believe him and move on but that part of you feels hurt and re jected, or part of you is scared he might not be attracted to you anymore? Maybe you need more opportunities to come to him with your vulnerability — and he needs more opportuni ties to be empathetic and soothing.

Also, try having a few good experiences of real world sex together and put this behind you. You've been together for six years, so try adding new elements that will bring out some excitement and passion in both of you and get you to that aroused place where you can't keep your hands off each other.

Bottom line: You had an argument, and you need to repair. And when you have an argument that touches on sex, sometimes the repair is in the sex itself.

Q: *I've been with my boyfriend for a year now, and for about half that time we've been in a long-distance relationship. I'm very for ward and sexual, but he saves his affection for when we're in the bedroom — or, in our case, when we're in the same town. I think sexting is an important part of any relationship, long distance or not, but he won't get onboard. It's truly frustrating. My argument is that since he s never done anything like that, he shouldn't re ject it just because he feels u comfortable. How do I make him feel more at ease in the sexting realm? T.C.*

A: How cool that you're so open to keeping things sexy and alive when you're apart. I think you're totally on the right track, and there's so much you can do — from sexting to Skype sex to remote-controlled sex toys — to stimulate each other long distance. But those options may take you to deeper waters, in that case, he has to start by dipping his toes in the shallow end.

I like that you're able to "mentalize" what he might be experiencing: mainly lack of com fort and experience. Have you tried having a conversation with him in which you appeal to these vulnerabilities — something like "Hey, I know sexting may be out of your comfort zone, and I'm sorry if I'm pressuring you. It's just that I'm really into you and it's hard to be apart. And when you shut me down, it makes me feel rejected." In that statement, you're trying to do a few things: You're giving yourself a way to open up the conversation and acknowledge his vulnerabilities while expressing yours. He may get defensive at first, but don't let him escalate. Just keep coming back to the vulnerability.

Ideally, getting off the main floor of life, as I like to say, and going down to the basement, where all those vulnerable emotions are safely stored, will set the stage for experimentation and sexual connection. Finally, whether you envision sexting as words, photos or both, you can start the process by sending him simple questions to which he can respond yes or no, such as "I'm having a sexy daydream about doing [fill in the blank] when I get my hands, mouth on you. Is that something you'd like?" ■

Viktoriia Shyrokova

Instagram **@tory_rebel**

Photography by Olga Novikova | @olga_novikova_work

Could you tell us a bit about yourself? 'm a woman who stopped asking for permission to be herself love speed, freedom, and the stillness of early mornings before the world wakes up There's something deeply meditative about riding a motorcycle the rhythm of the engine, the wind against your skin, the sense of total presence I live between travels, captured moments, and flashes where I feel fully alive have a special love for wearing latex it's a mix of power, sensuality, and self-expression that makes me feel unstoppable

Can you give us a background on your career and where it all started? t started with a deep desire to see the world and to show it to others didn't follow a standard path I created my own I've always been drawn to the mix of beauty, strength, and inner depth and that became the heart of my journey

Any further credits or projects you'd like to mention? I believe the most exciting things are still ahead But in the present moment, I'm focused on projects where feminine energy, power, and freedom are at the center My path isn't just about aesthetics it's a message And 'm working to make that message louder

What's one thing you've learned about yourself? can be many things soft and sharp, light and wild And it's all me True strength comes when you stop fighting yourself and start listening

What is the biggest misconception people have about you? That if you're beautiful, you must be superficial Or that femininity is a weakness In reality, I ride motorcycles, shoot with precision, and stay calm in high pressure situations Beauty isn't a mask it's an energy, and it comes in many forms

Do you have any hidden talents? If so, what are they? I paint, and that's how I speak without words 'm also an excellent shot The combination of artistry and accuracy says more about me than any bio ever could

In what ways do you use your platform to inspire or influence others? speak honestly share the journey that every woman goes through the journey back to herself I believe female

power doesn't come from perfection but from authenticity If my words or images light a fire in someone, then know 'm on the right path

What message do you hope to convey through your work? You can be anything a dreamer, a warrior, a seeker, an artist You're not meant to fit into boxes You're meant to break them

How do you prepare mentally and physically for a big photoshoot or event? 'm all about rituals Morning yoga, breathing, a little silence I need to feel my body and connect to my energy Sometimes, I wear lingerie under my clothes not for anyone else, but for me It puts me in a state where I don't just enter the frame I own it.

When you're not working, what helps you decompress and relax? Solitude Mountains, sunrises, or just riding my motorcycle with no destination just the road And yoga, always it reminds me that strength lives in balance Sometimes, the best way to recharge is to do nothing at all and just breathe.

What's the strangest fan encounter you've ever had? One told me he dreamed I came to him riding a black motorcycle and "rescued him from mediocrity" almost felt bad it was only a dream But who knows some dreams do come true.

If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? A camera Even on a deserted island, 'd want to capture the light, the solitude, the strength, and the unrepeatable moments Maybe no one else would ever see them but 'd know they happened Memory is an art form too.

What's your go-to guilty pleasure snack? Dark chocolate with sea salt and chili Like me - sweet, but with a kick

Any last words or advice for our readers? Be honest with yourself. Don't play roles that aren't yours Let yourself be bold, quiet, sensual, vulnerable whatever you are Real freedom begins when you stop waiting for approval and start living your truth

Playboy Interview

Dennis Rodman

A candid conversation with the NBA's boa-clad bad boy about rebounding, oral sex, lap dances, kicking that cameraman and how, deep down, he's really a very shy man

INTERVIEW BY **KEVIN COOK** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **BILL SMITH**

"This will be your most difficult interview ever." So said a friend who has prowled a few nights with the Chicago Bulls' freaky forward. Three days later we agreed that hanging with Dennis Rodman, discussing his public and private self in hotel rooms, casinos and nightclubs, was difficult at times—times like sunup, for instance. It was also rewarding in unexpected ways.

Our weekend with Rodman began with a visit to his agent, Dwight Manley, one of the real life models for Tom Cruise's character in Jerry Maguire. Yes, Manley said, Dennis liked the idea of doing PLAYBOY. And since he was serving an 11-game suspension for kicking a cameraman, he had some free time. But there would be ground rules. m"Not rules so much as ways of approaching Dennis," said Manley, as if he were discussing nitroglycerin. In the end, however, the Rodman rules were simple. First, Dennis does only and exactly what he wants. Might talk, might not. Meet him for dinner, hit a few nightclubs. If he offers to buy you a lap dance, you're in.

Erratic? Expensive? Extremely, but any difficulty was a small price for quality time with the only cross-dressing, nose- and scrotum-pierced, best-selling multimillionaire author we know.

Rodman was born 36 years ago and grew up in the Oak Cliff projects of south Dallas. His father, Philander Rodman, abandoned the family when Dennis was three. Philander eventually moved to the Philippines, where he claims to have fathered 27 children. Dennis grew up with his disapproving mother, Shirley, and two younger sisters, Debra and Kim, who both played basketball better than he did. The girls became college all-Americans, while their big brother became a janitor and a thief.

After Shirley kicked her bad boy out of the house, Rodman was homeless. At 20 he was pushing a broom on the graveyard shift at Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport. One night he used a broom handle to pilfer 50 watches from a closed gift shop. He was jailed overnight and fired. Rodman hit bottom, then rebounded in a big way. He had grown almost 12 inches in a year. The clumsy high schooler who had never played a varsity game was now a force in neighborhood pickup games. Still, his coming-out party flopped. While averaging 17 points and 13 rebounds for Cooke County Junior College, Rodman flunked out.

Fortunately for today's Bulls fans, as well as for MTV and the feather boa industry, an assistant coach at tiny Southeastern Oklahoma State University saw Rodman play that year. Soon Dennis was a hoops hero in Durant, Oklahoma.

From 1984 to 1986 he averaged 26 points and 15.6 rebounds for the Southeastern Oklahoma State Savages. Rodman was a three-time NAIA all-American. Still, he says he was p"a lost soul." Durant had a population of 6000. It was 5999 white folks and him. Fortunately a local family had taken him in. James Rich, a mailman, his wife, Pat, and their 13-year-old son, Bryne, virtually adopted Rodman. Bryne, who had accidentally shot and killed his best friend on a hunting trip, had terrible nightmares and needed a friend. Dennis, at 22, needed a family. On his first night in the Rich home he left the couch and slept on a trundle bed in Bryne's room.

> *"Look, I have sex a lot. Sometimes it's just going through the motions. I've faked."*

Soon Rodman was milking cows and feeding chickens. Though he loved his foster family, he couldn't escape outsider status. The Riches tried to accept their friend Worm (a nickname for the way he wiggled playing video games). Yet there was evil gossip in town. It got so bad that Pat was reluctant to go out in public with Dennis. Eventually they became a functional family, and the Riches filled a gap in Rodman's life between the projects and the NBA, where he finally found the father he had been looking for.

In 1986 Detroit Pistons coach Chuck Daly risked the 27th pick of the NBA draft on the skinny no-name who became, at 25, the oldest rookie in the league. During the next two seasons Daly, a man Rodman almost worshiped, cased Dennis past All-Star Adrian Dantley into the starting lineup for the famed Bad Boy Pistons. In the 1988-1989 season, Rodman averaged 9.4 rebounds and Detroit swept the Lakers for the NBA title.

Detroit won another championship the next season. Rodman was the league's defensive player of the year. He would soon lead the NBA in rebounding year after year; his 1991-1992 average of 18.7 rebounds was the best since Wilt Chamberlain led the league two decades earlier. But by 1993 Detroit's title team was dismantled and Daly was eased out—betrayed by the club, Rodman thought.

One day that year, Detroit police found Rodman in his pickup truck at dawn. He had a loaded rifle next to him and said that he was contemplating suicide. Before long he had been traded to San Antonio, where his colorful mean streak started making news.

It was in Texas that Rodman started dyeing his hair. Next came tattoos and piercing, and he began making borderline nutty statements. The man who didn't play much offense started giving plenty. He belittled Spurs coach Bob Hill, calling him Boner. He also expressed contempt for Spurs hero David Robinson, publicly questioning Robinson's guts. He refused to help Robinson on defense and turned his back on team huddles. He started going AWOL. Rodman won the rebounding title both years in San Antonio, but in 1995 the Spurs gladly traded him to Chicago for Will Perdue.

That deal had a notable sidelight. Bulls stars Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen have veto power on trades, but both agreed to welcome Rodman to Chicago. Though they remembered the 1991 playoffs, when Rodman shoved Pippen into the stands (leaving Pippen with a nasty gash on his face and Rodman with a $5000 fine), the Bulls' scorers wanted the game's best rebounder on their side.

Today, Pippen's chin bears the scar of Rodman's cheap shot. And Jordan can barely conceal his irritation with the Bulls' antic antihero. Yet with all three of them in the lineup, there is little doubt the Bulls are the best team the game has ever seen.

Meanwhile, Rodman transcends his craft. It was news last year when Sports Illustrated suggested that he might be the best rebounder of all time. Wilt Chamberlain has disagreed. In turn, Rodman has challenged Wilt by attacking a statistic that means as much to both men as rebounds: sexual conquests.

When the Stilt boasted of having had sex with 20,000 women, Rodman wrote in his best-seller, Bad As I Wanna Be, that m"Wilt Chamberlain bed out of his ass." That was one of many naughty bits in the book that made the tattooed cross-dresser a crossover superstar. He also quoted Madonna's pillow talk: "Are you going to eat my pussy first?" and "I want every drop of your come inside me."

Then he acted hurt when she called him p"disgusting."

Rodman is good at acting hurt. His book portrays him as something of an all-purpose victim. Nobody understands him, everybody wants a piece of him. And while some of his poor-Dennis pose is mere marketing—would anyone feel sorry for a happy millionaire?—his gripes sound sincere when you meet him.

For all his fame and his millions, Rodman carries a big chip on his tattooed shoulder. Yes, he has a big-budget action movie, Double Team, in theaters near you. He has his own show on MTV. He has a new book, Walk on the Wild Side, out to explain his innermost thoughts. Yet he insists that he is misunderstood. Maybe that's

what makes Dennis Rodman the most postmodern celeb of them all. He is everywhere, emptily. He is in your face in movies, TV, bookstores, video games, action figures and virtual reality, but he says you don't really know him.

We sent Contributing Editor Kevin Cook to Las Vegas to get to know Rodman. He was joined by well-known Chicago businessman Bill Marovitz, who assisted Cook both as an interviewer and as a guide on some unique Rodmanesque adventures. Cook reports:

"We met in Las Vegas, where the scenery matches Rodman's hair. I arrived at the Mirage Hotel and Casino, his Vegas headquarters, with time to spare. In fact, since it took Rodman about 28 hours to show up for our first talk, I had time to prepare a long list of questions.

"Those questions wound up on a disco floor somewhere. My first night with Dennis taught me that lists are useless with this guy. He may be the most nonlinear man I've ever met. You don't need questions to talk with Dennis Rodman. Benzedrine, maybe. One does not sit with him. Instead you chase him, ride in limos and watch topless dancers with him, keep changing the subject until a topic sparks his interest. Going into this interview I expected him to be surly, but at two a.m., even after a few drinks, he was bright-eyed and funny, with a knack for metaphor that startled me.

"I don't give a fuck about anybody in the NBA. Hanging with Michael Jordan is supposed to be big news? Please."

"After a day of waiting I had hooked up with his crew for a ten p.m. dinner at the Mirage. Ten p.m. is the beginning of late for me, but for Rodman it's the dawn of a night he intends to grab and squeeze like a stray rebound. That night, fresh off a standing ovation on Jay Leno's Tonight Show, Rodman strode through the Mirage in furry tiger-striped pants and a leather shirt that showed off his muscled chest. His hair was the color of a lemon-lime Lava lamp. He lifted an eyebrow when his agent announced that I was there to do the Dennis Rodman Playboy Interview. Rodman's expression said, We'll see about that.

"During the next three days I would sleep a total of five hours. I would get to know the Rodman group, featuring Manley as well as Dennis' weekend girlfriend. And wise Wendell Williams, Rodman's 280-pound bodyguard, gave me the first quote I wrote down. p'Dennis isn't crazy. Dennis is free.'

"Rodman is no ordinary chat. I didn't so much converse with him as step into his stream of consciousness.

"We began in his limo, zooming past the giant fountain at Caesars Palace."

RODMAN: Evel Knievel jumped a motorcycle over this fountain. That was so cool.

PLAYBOY: Is that your idea of celebrity?

RODMAN: You know how I see it? Not to be bigheaded, but shit, you can put me up there with Jim Morrison, fucking goddamn Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin.

PLAYBOY: They're all dead.

RODMAN: They say Elvis is dead. I say, no, you're looking at him. Elvis isn't dead, he just changed color.

PLAYBOY: You're in Chicago Bulls colors tonight—a floor-length red jacket and black shirt.

RODMAN: No. This coat is not red. It's hot pink. I am a multicolored individual. A different color every day. They call me the Worm, but that's wrong. I'm the fucking chameleon.

PLAYBOY: Why is America paying you so much attention?

RODMAN: I give them a little thrill, all the people who forgot that life is fun. It's like The Phantom of the Opera—it might scare them, but they like it. But it's just a fad. I'm a fad. I am on fire right now, dude, but it won't last forever.

PLAYBOY: Are you more comfortable in public or in private?

RODMAN: Public.

[As his entourage streamed through the casino at the Rio Suite Hotel, all eyes followed the towering, pink-coated Rodman. Whether he was gambling or on the move, his only protection was bodyguard Williams, who gently turned away autograph seekers. One girl got to Dennis by pleading, actually going to one knee as she cried, m"Please! It's my bachelorette party." With a nod to his bodyguard "It's OK." Rodman allowed the girl to kiss him, and she raced down an aisle of slot machines, yelling, "I kissed Dennis Rodman! I kissed Dennis Rodman!"

We sat in Club Rio at a table soon littered with empty shot glasses and beer bottles. The star seemed momentarily bored. There were two autograph hunters nearby, Rodman pointed to me as if trying to impress them.]

RODMAN: [*To the fans*] No autographs. Doing an interview here.

PLAYBOY: Does all the hubbub ever bother you?

RODMAN: [*Nodding, calling for a round of drinks*] I was in this club and when I went up to dance, everybody stopped dancing. They stood there watching me. I sat back down.

PLAYBOY: How do you relax?

RODMAN. Spend time with people who have a good time. The people you see in my limo. Fuckers who are fun. People who P-A-R-T-Y! Why party? Because I can. [He hugs his female companion.] This is fun right here. When you are in Dennis Rodman's clan you celebrate the living of life. So once I'm with people I like, I relax. Because I know there's people out there who want to fuck me.

PLAYBOY: Thousands.

RODMAN: No, I don't mean literally want to fuck me. There are assholes who don't like me.

PLAYBOY: Including the NBA?

RODMAN: I fuck up the NBA image, their whole business enterprise. Because I can express myself as an individual. In their high-society sport, I bring it from the heart.

PLAYBOY: You are known for your court sense—for anticipating what's going to happen next on the floor. Can you do that with trends, too? Did you plan the Rodman fad?

RODMAN: My things are never planned. I visualize, I focus and analyze, but I'm always in the here and now. Once I learned to be myself, to express myself, the rest just happened. And now I'm in the atmosphere. I am the reality. I'm Elvis, Jimi Hendrix and the Grateful Dead all wrapped into one. The president of the United States gets a hard on just thinking about me.

PLAYBOY: Supposedly that doesn't take much.

RODMAN: His wife was on TV, joking around that she was g"Hillary Rodman Clinton." Now, I always thought you had to have sex with a person before you took his name. So maybe she was thinking about it. I can see them in bed, the president's making love and she's saying, "Oh, oh, Dennis—I mean, Bill!"

PLAYBOY: What else amuses you about your fad?

RODMAN: My life is a circus. My year is 365 days of fucking confusion. But I'm still leading in rebounding, 600 plus rebounds in only 30-some games. Nothing is planned. My life is more addictive. But I love it. I keep Lucifer wondering, What will he do next? Will he really play his last game in the nude?

PLAYBOY: Michael Jordan told us he's against any such thing.

RODMAN: It'll happen. You'll see it.

PLAYBOY: Some people call you the world's weirdest athlete.

RODMAN: I'm not an athlete. Athletes are boring, typical and predictable. I can't even watch them talk on TV. You know, the scene after the game.

PLAYBOY: They're all putting the team first and giving 110 percent.

RODMAN: Save it. The difference between me and athletes is, they want to be athletes. They even want to be coaches when their careers are over. I am above all that. But still, I have my downfall every year. Some little thing blows up on me. A couple years ago I head-butted a ref and got suspended. This year it was kicking that cameraman motherfucker, Eugene Amos.

PLAYBOY: Amos is a courtside photographer. You plowed into him trying to save a loose ball. What made you kick him?

RODMAN: It was a trigger reaction. Can't I have a bad day? It's like you coming home from work. Maybe you've been working hard, focusing hard all day, you come home and your wife sits there bitching about the smallest fucking thing. Something triggers in the brain and you might lash out.

PLAYBOY: Should Amos have been there? In other sports the press isn't allowed to be so close to the action.

"I have done a lot for the gay community. I make it more acceptable. I am an entertainer, a phenomenon and a historical landmark."

RODMAN: We need more room. The cameras they use today can shoot pictures of you from the moon, so why are they right up on the court? I could have broken my leg running into him and his camera. I think they should be at least two or three feet back.

PLAYBOY: Amos dropped charges against you after you paid him a handsome settlement. How did that work? Did you have a meeting?

RODMAN: It was a telephone call. He sounded like a politician. g"Thank you very much," he said, "and God bless." Then I see on the news, just last week, Eugene Amos got arrested for beating his girlfriend.

PLAYBOY: Vindication?

RODMAN: Vindication in a way. It shows you that life has its wacky ways of working out.

PLAYBOY: Maybe Amos should give your $200,000 to his girlfriend.

RODMAN: He should give it back to my ass.

PLAYBOY: Speaking of numbers, you state that Wilt Chamberlain lied when he claimed he'd had sex with 20,000 women. But you have never mentioned your own career total.

RODMAN: In my whole life I have had between 25 and 30 women. Maybe five good ones.

PLAYBOY: You wrote in your book that you were still a virgin at 20.

RODMAN: Well, I'm making up for lost time. My hormones run wild like the fever of typhus, baby.

PLAYBOY: Why such a late start?

RODMAN: When you live in the community I was in, with no money, and you're not good-looking, I didn't have shit. Never went to the school prom. I didn't even like girls. Look, when you are just a motherfucking guy in the neighborhood trying to survive, it's not a sexual environment.

PLAYBOY: g"Not good looking"? Is that what you think when you look in the mirror?

RODMAN: I don't look at mirrors. I'm too fucking ugly.

PLAYBOY: We could easily round up 100 women who would jump at the chance to sleep with you, tonight.

RODMAN: I just don't like mirrors.

PLAYBOY: Is it true that you were so asexual you didn't masturbate until you were 19?

RODMAN: That's right. But the first time, I was already an expert. Just about jerked the head off it. [He mimes wrestling a fire hose.]

PLAYBOY: You've said you try to be faithful to whomever your current girlfriend may be. If she's not in town you sometimes satisfy yourself. You even gave your hands sexy names.

RODMAN: Monique and Judy. In case I get frustrated and confused, I always know they can help my ass out. If Monique gets tired, turn to Judy.

PLAYBOY: Not everyone is so candid about masturbating.
RODMAN: Masturbation happens 16 billion times a day. Every man and woman does it. It's like the wildfires of California, baby, so we may as well say it.
[By now we had changed venues again. We were at a club called Drink and Eat Too. Even louder than the Rio, it was jammed with drinkers, dancers and Rodman watchers. The watchee stood in a corner behind the bar, which was a step above the floor. From there he peered impassively down at all the faces upturned toward him. We had given up our talk for the night. Drink was too loud. Then Rodman shouted, in "Reporter, reporter!" We were under way again.]
PLAYBOY: You say your goal in life is freedom, being free of society's rules or even those of the NBA. When do you feel free?
RODMAN: Having sex.
PLAYBOY: Tell us more. What do you want in bed?
RODMAN: I want a woman who's free. That means she's independent and desirable. I could use some independence in a woman, too. Usually when I have sex I am in control, I'm dominant, but I'd like some woman to get on top of me and be in control for half an hour, do me for a half hour. Then we'd be even.
PLAYBOY: What makes a man good in bed?
RODMAN: Confidence. He should be confident in his dick. And eat pussy big time, too. Go down under and have a fucking groundhog for lunch, that's my advice.
PLAYBOY: Yet you wouldn't do that with Madonna.
RODMAN: That was a flash in the past. Can we leave Madonna alone? She's a good woman. I hope she gets what she wants.
PLAYBOY: That was gallant. OK, let's talk about your job. How does today's NBA compare with the league of 10 years ago, when you were a rookie?
RODMAN: It's going downhill. The younger players have a whole different vibe, a different game. Some are big stars before they even play in our league, and right away they want to be more famous. Everyone wants to shoot. Everybody wants to be a big fucking star. But there are only about 20 real stars, and maybe four shining stars, in the league. Maybe one ultimate star.
PLAYBOY: Jordan? Or you?
RODMAN: Who cares? I just rack and roll.
PLAYBOY: You said four shining stars. Name them.
RODMAN: No, you name them. Go ahead. Knock yourself out.
PLAYBOY: Jordan, Shaq, you and Little Penny.
RODMAN: I don't care. I don't like the whole athlete phenomenon.
PLAYBOY: Hasn't it made you rich? Tonight we watched you playing blackjack and craps with $1000 chips. You must have had $30,000 in front of you.
RODMAN: I've got between $25 million and $50 million, and I fucking E.F. Huttoned it, dude. I earned it.
PLAYBOY: You got the money and three championship rings for being a great rebounder, the one who's famous for how much he studies the game. Even your critics say you might have the best court sense since Magic Johnson. Chamberlain was bigger and possibly better, but aren't you the thinkingest rebounder?
RODMAN: I study my craft. I can visualize the court, the ball and the action on the rim all at once. Never the other player. I think the game, not the people in it.
PLAYBOY: When you joined Chicago you spent hours in the gym rebounding for Jordan and Scottie Pippen.
RODMAN: Studying. Programming my mind. I study the people who shoot the ball. The way they like to shoot, where the ball likes to come off when they miss—you get a feel for it. Then when the game starts I can let my mind relax and go into that feel, the flow of the game. It's like rolling dice. Sometimes you get a feel for the dice. You can feel a seven coming. The ball is funny like that; I'll watch the ball—even watching a game on TV—and know if it's going off to the right or to the left.
PLAYBOY: Do you think teenagers such as Kevin Garnett, Kobe Bryant and Jermaine O'Neal know their craft?
RODMAN: They're not here just because somebody said they were good, are they? They have real talent. They had the feeling, now they have to show us they're that good. I think they can do it, but they haven't yet.
PLAYBOY: Are younger players worth what they're getting paid?
RODMAN: Paying players $90 million is ridiculous. Even $30 million. Think of the lifetimes people work to get that much money. If you're going to pay players $90 million, I say they should run the team. Get out of the way. But if you are going to pay this ridiculous money, pay the players who are worth it. Not the ones who haven't done it yet. Pay the ones who win. Pay the ones who are out there giving you 110 percent every night.
PLAYBOY: People might be surprised to hear Dennis Rodman complain about overhyped NBA players.
RODMAN: Fine, but you know what? I am about to do something that has never been done in the history of sport. Before next season I am going to sign a $9 million or $10 million contract and tell the team, g"If I'm not worth it, don't pay me. If I don't play up to that contract, keep the money." I'll play the whole year for free.
PLAYBOY: Do you mean that?
RODMAN: That's right.
PLAYBOY: This is a pledge you're making here tonight?
RODMAN: It is. I'm already giving money back. When I come off suspension, I'm giving my pay to charity for the first 11 games. That's a million dollars.
PLAYBOY: Does it sting to be suspended—kicked out of the game for a month?
RODMAN: It gave me time to clear my head. Sometimes my life is so fucked up I don't know what's happening to me. I need time.
PLAYBOY: You're no longer part of Nike's ad roster, are you?
RODMAN: So I have no Nike deal. Nike is a swoosh in the past.
PLAYBOY: The league has threatened serious action if you misbehave again. There has been talk of a lifetime ban. Pippen says you learn nothing from all your crime and punishment. Will you be

"In my whole life I have had between 25 and 30 women. Maybe five good ones."

more careful?
RODMAN: No. If I fuck up, I fuck up. I live in the here and now, and I am not dead yet. But if I die tomorrow, I'll die with a smile on my face.
PLAYBOY: Suppose you punch a coach tomorrow. Could you smile at a lifetime ban?
RODMAN: That won't happen. They will never do that. I am too much of a hot commodity. The NBA won't say goodbye to me. They need me. The NBA is a cripple and I am the crutch. Ha! They tell me to act like a typical athlete, but they are playing both sides of the fence. I get attention. They profit off me. But I am giving those fogies and they can't do a damn thing about it.
PLAYBOY: The Bulls reportedly ordered you to tone it down. How did that work? Did coach Phil Jackson or owner Jerry Reinsdorf call you in?
RODMAN: They don't talk to me. In a sense they want to control me, but they really want me to go out in the games and do my thing.
PLAYBOY: You loved Chuck Daly, your first pro coach. Then his championship team was dismantled. Daly was bounced and you were traded.
RODMAN: Chuck Daly was a loving, caring man who let you be a man. We won championships. It was a phase I went through.
PLAYBOY: Are you a role model?
RODMAN: No. I don't ask people to look up to me. Nobody in the world is a role model except to his own kids. People think athletes and entertainers are role models for kids, but they're wrong. Kids today have more options than we ever had. They don't need me to show them. These kids are 15 years old, partying their asses off. Every day is Woodstock. But I do ask people to respect the individuality I bring to the table.
PLAYBOY: You are a role model for individualists.
RODMAN: People say they don't want our young black kids looking like Dennis Rodman. I'm not asking for that. If it's what they choose, that's their business.
PLAYBOY: Do you want to be back with the Bulls next year?
RODMAN: Very much.
PLAYBOY: Do you care whether Jackson coaches next year?
RODMAN: It's important. You need to have confidence in a coach. I need a good vibe. I call Phil Jackson Lord of Lords—he is psychic. I have had two great coaches in my life, Chuck Daly and Phil Jackson. I don't want any more coaches.
PLAYBOY: If you were uncool enough to coach, what team rules would you have?
RODMAN: Show up for the game. Don't give my ass. That's all you need.
PLAYBOY: Are you friends with Michael Jordan?
RODMAN: I told you I don't give a fuck about anybody in the NBA. I don't hang with athletes. Hanging with Michael Jordan is supposed to be big news? Please.
PLAYBOY: You trashed some stars in your book: David Robinson is gutless, Pippen can be intimidated. How did they react?
RODMAN: They didn't. I think they respected me for being myself.
PLAYBOY: Talk about a few of your colleagues. How would you describe Michael Jordan?
RODMAN: He's an intriguing, special performer.
PLAYBOY: Scottie Pippen?
RODMAN: A major star in his own world.
PLAYBOY: Charles Barkley?
RODMAN: The Reggie White of the NBA.
PLAYBOY: Shaquille O'Neal?
RODMAN: The future.
PLAYBOY: Do you think NBA commissioner David Stern would like to kick you out of the league?
RODMAN: I don't give a damn what David Stern thinks. He's not my fucking father. I don't care what Stern thinks, but I'll tell you what he thinks. He thinks I'm good for the league. David Stern is a closet Dennis Rodman fan.
PLAYBOY: Daly is often called your father figure. The same goes for James Rich, the Oklahoma mailman who took you into his home. Have you been looking for a father since Philander Rodman left when you were three years old?
RODMAN: I don't think that's true.
PLAYBOY: How did you manage without one?
RODMAN: I got used to it. Anyway, a man can't make you be a man. You have to do that yourself. You figure out that life is unpredictable and complicated and that you may not be happy. That's when you become a man.
PLAYBOY: Your father finally wrote to you last year. He sent you a letter from the Philippines.
RODMAN: I didn't get it.
PLAYBOY: After 32 years, he said he wanted to meet you.
RODMAN: He tried to. To me he's just another person trying to get a piece of the action. I don't hate the guy, but hey, I made it without him for all these years. If I met him I'd treat him like anybody else—like the people in the casino who want an autograph. After I got through with everybody else I would shake his hand, too, and say, g"How you doing? Nice to meet you."
PLAYBOY: And move on.
RODMAN: That's it.
PLAYBOY: Like your vindication with the photographer. What goes around.
RODMAN: Comes around.
PLAYBOY: Is it true that you were so shy as a kid that you had to be pushed off the school bus?
RODMAN: I wasn't really who I am until later. I was shy. I had the same feelings as the other kids, but on the outside I was just going through the motions. Other kids don't give you the option of being happy, being yourself.
PLAYBOY: Did you ever try religion?
RODMAN: Went to church every Sunday until I was 21. I grew up Christian, Baptist, but I could be it all. I do believe in a holy spirit. I don't think you need to go to church to pray. That almighty spirit is everywhere. God is out there working.
PLAYBOY: Does he or she have a special plan for you?
RODMAN: No. I have no purpose at all. I mean, we can always pray to the holy spirit to whisk us away and make everything better, but who knows if that prayer gets there? It's only a mirage.
PLAYBOY: It's probably safe to say that your God isn't some bearded giant wearing a white robe.
RODMAN: Totally safe.
PLAYBOY: Maybe white robes and a boa?
RODMAN: Who knows? He might have on a thong.
PLAYBOY: There is a bit of your legend that doesn't make sense: your theft of 50 watches when you were a janitor at DFW airport. Everyone in the airport can see the security cameras all around. Didn't you know you would be caught?
RODMAN: Maybe I did it to get caught. Sometimes in life you have to light some dynamite, see if it blows up.
PLAYBOY: In a bid for popularity, you gave free watches to almost everyone you knew.
RODMAN: I didn't need popularity. But I didn't need that many watches, and I didn't take them to sell them. It was more to try something different, see what happens.
PLAYBOY: You must have felt alone the night you spent in jail. What was it like in an airport jail?
RODMAN: It's a holding pen. They handcuff you. You sit and wait until the police come pick you up and take you to real jail.
PLAYBOY: Before you finally found basketball stardom at Southeastern Oklahoma State, the James Rich family took you in. You befriended teenager Bryne Rich after he killed a friend in a hunting accident, and you lived with the Riches almost as a son.
RODMAN: Bryne is still my best friend. We were a couple of lost souls. For us, life was fucking confusion plus a bunch of goddamn agony. You just hoped for some part-time happiness once in a while.
PLAYBOY: What do the Riches think of your celebrity?
RODMAN: They're not starstruck. Or they don't show it. One thing about people in Oklahoma, they don't show what they're thinking.
PLAYBOY: Did you dream of playing in the NBA?
RODMAN: Basketball wasn't my dream. I never considered it.
PLAYBOY: No posters of Chamberlain or Bill Russell?
RODMAN: If I had been like that, I wouldn't be here now. No, I didn't want to be in the NBA. But I always had an idea something was going to happen to me. It didn't start until I was over 30 years old and learned to express myself.
PLAYBOY: You were 31 when Detroit police found you sleeping in your truck outside the Palace in Auburn Hills. You had a loaded rifle with you. You have said you were thinking of killing yourself. Instead, you decided to change your life.
RODMAN: That was the beginning of salvation. I was 32 years old before I found out who I really am. From then on I just did it, whatever it was.
PLAYBOY: Soon came the tattoos, nose rings and wild hair.
RODMAN: If not for that I would have been more subdued, just an athlete. But I'm having my childhood again from zero to 20. Right now I might be five years old.
[*Soon the Rodman party was in the limo to Paradise, a nightclub where Dennis bought more rounds of drinks. He handed his Peruvian surfer friend Pepe, a fistful of $1000 chips for safekeeping. the bulge in Pepe's pocket easily held $20,000 in chips. Paradise is a gentlemen's club, a lap-dance joint. No touching, topless women writhe to disco music a half inch from men who pay to be teased. Dennis, who had already bought numerous drinks and flagons of coffee, offered to buy another round—not drinks this time, but lap dances.*]
PLAYBOY: Thanks, but no thanks.
RODMAN: Come on. Just because you're married?
PLAYBOY: Exactly.
RODMAN: Your wife ain't God, man! She can't see through walls.
[*He playfully shoved us toward a dancer. Without thinking we shoved back. As bodyguard Williams shot us a glance it occurred to us. Had we just missed a chance to earn a quick $200,000? Once again, much of our subsequent talk was shouted over pounding disco music. Sometimes D, as his friends call him, was being m'lapped" as we spoke.*]

PLAYBOY: How many of the breasts here are all-natural?
RODMAN: I'd say 40 percent. What are you drinking? Let's get three more Jägers over here.
PLAYBOY: Jägermeister—the shot-glass drink of champions. You have had more than a few tonight. How can you drink so much and still perform so well on the court?
RODMAN: What the fuck did you say?
PLAYBOY: Do you have a hangover cure?
RODMAN: There is no such thing as a hangover cure.
PLAYBOY: How can you drink so much and be so fit?
RODMAN: I'm talking to you, right? I am on fire! This will be a great interview for you. Because I prepared my mind, bro. I can prepare my mind to party or do business. I can do both. Now, I don't party like this during the season, at least not every day. You have to pick your times. There are times when you need to do business, be physically inclined, do your job. That's when I do business first and party later.
PLAYBOY: Are you ever alone?
RODMAN: Game days I keep to myself.
PLAYBOY: Your workouts are grueling. You'll lift weights for two hours before a game, then run the court and tussle with some of the world's finest athletes, then pump iron for two more hours before you shower. Is that how you get the alcohol out? How much weight do you lift in a day?
RODMAN: I can lift what the mind can endure.
PLAYBOY: What thoughts do you have when the ball is in play? Are you thinking in words?
RODMAN: It's a melody, brother. No matter what the tempo of the game, it's always a melody.
PLAYBOY: Off the court, can you control yourself?

RODMAN: [*Shrugs*] Sometimes I don't know what the fuck is going on. I don't. I really don't want to do some of the things I do

PLAYBOY: What's taboo to you? Anything?

RODMAN: I don't believe in limits. Killing yourself is the only limit.

PLAYBOY: Bob Knight thinks you're a fake. He calls you a "the greatest hustler in the history of mankind."

RODMAN: He said hustler?

PLAYBOY: Hustler.

RODMAN: Then call me Mr. Flynt! I'll be the number one hustler.

PLAYBOY: You wrote that there was a surge in AIDS awareness among NBA players after Magic Johnson announced he was HIV-positive.

RODMAN: Then it went back to the way it was. Athletes are like anybody else. They might plan to use a rubber, but then it doesn't feel right, so they take it off.

PLAYBOY: Doesn't every team have an AIDS meeting—some doctor or therapist coming in to tell all the players to use condoms?

RODMAN: That lasts about 15 minutes.

PLAYBOY: How much NBA sex do you think is safe sex?

RODMAN: It's probably about 50-50.

PLAYBOY: Are we headed for a scourge of AIDS among pro athletes?

RODMAN: Why blame the athletes? Athletes didn't start the idea of fucking without condoms. They aren't role models and they don't set a goddamn precedent for society. Don't point to the athletes—they're just like anybody else.

PLAYBOY: Except for being young and rich and having lots of women begging them for sex.

RODMAN: Wear you out.

PLAYBOY: What if you learned you were HIV positive? How would you react?

RODMAN: What can anyone do? Anybody who has it, what can you do but blame yourself?

PLAYBOY: Such a sad topic. We should try to lighten up. Tell us what you think is your best color.

RODMAN: White.

PLAYBOY: For purity.

RODMAN: Girls that are white. I like pink, too. The pink and white clouds of love.

PLAYBOY: What's your best feature?

RODMAN: Best feature? Muscle control. Talk about muscle control—g"Oh, oh daddy!" It makes for the best fucking around.

PLAYBOY: You have women chasing you from coast to coast. GQ says you might be our greatest m"vulva magnet." Is that a heavy reputation to carry around? Can you live up to your image as a sexual performer?

RODMAN: I don't see it like that. I don't have to prove myself.

PLAYBOY: You imply in your book that you sometimes fake in bed.

RODMAN: I did?

PLAYBOY: You say that sometimes you yell and shout to make the woman you're with feel good about her performance.

RODMAN: Look, I have sex a lot. Sometimes it's just going through the motions. I've faked. Women are always faking that shit. I'm just flipping the coin.

PLAYBOY: Another example of your versatility. You have also made headlines by wearing makeup and dressing in drag. Many people believe you're gay or bisexual, though you have never admitted having a gay experience. What's the current state of your sexuality?

RODMAN: I wouldn't be ashamed to say I was gay. I'm the first to say I would fuck a man's brains out. Giving it or getting it, taking or giving, don't matter—it's all about getting that sensation you want. And on that day I want to fuck a man, I'll announce it. I'll make sure everyone in the world knows I'm gay.

PLAYBOY: But you haven't actually done it yet.

RODMAN: I mentally masturbate. I have sex in my mind. It happens all the time.

PLAYBOY: Are you attracted to men?

RODMAN: We all have a little homosexual in us. We pat each other on the ass. We kiss. I kiss transsexuals. If I think a guy is attractive I can tell him, g"You are a beautiful motherfucker." I'll hug him and kiss him.

PLAYBOY: If you kiss a man in friendship, does it matter if he's good looking?

RODMAN: [*Pauses*] Yes.

PLAYBOY: What does your mother think when she sees you in makeup and a gown?

RODMAN: She doesn't care. She's got a new house.

PLAYBOY: Do you ever wear women's clothing in private?

RODMAN: I wear it once in a while. It shows that I am not just an athlete. It shows that I'm not afraid of society. I'm unconventional.

PLAYBOY: You don't really have a gay streak, do you?

RODMAN: I have done a lot for the gay community. I make it more acceptable. I am an entertainer, a phenomenon and a historical landmark.

PLAYBOY: You say you don't mind fantasizing about gay sex, but you always stop short of actually doing it.

RODMAN: Sex should be a mystery. You need some mystery to it. You don't have that if everybody's the same. And if that's not true then everybody would be gay and lesbian, wouldn't they?

[*We finished on Sunday in his penthouse suite at the Mirage, high above the special effects volcano. Rodman was shirtless, stretching, just waking up for breakfast. It was four p.m. Rodman's female companion, Chicago businessman Bill Maravitz and bodyguard Williams were watching the NBA All-Star Game on TV. Rodman watched, but looked bored. He said the All-Star Game is over-hyped. Forty-eight hours before his return to the court, Rodman spoke softly.*]

PLAYBOY: When was the last time you were alone?

RODMAN: When I sleep, I'm alone.

"I have had two great coaches in my life, Chuck Daly and Phil Jackson. I don't want any more coaches."

PLAYBOY: Your agent, Dwight Manley, tells us that you sleepwalk. He'll be sleeping on the couch in your house or a hotel suite when you lumber out, push him aside and lie down.

RODMAN: No, no. That was kidding around.

PLAYBOY: But you do sleepwalk?

RODMAN: Sometimes. Everybody does.

PLAYBOY: That's not true.

RODMAN: Yes, you do it. Everybody sleepwalks once in a while.

PLAYBOY: Other than partying, have you prepared for the season's second half?

RODMAN: My mind is ready.

PLAYBOY: Do you have anything planned for your return?

RODMAN: Be in fucking character, that's it. When the camera is on, the shows begin.

PLAYBOY: You say you'll give your salary back next year if your performance doesn't measure up. Who decides whether you were good enough?

RODMAN: [*Smiling*] Me.

PLAYBOY: You say you don't plan ahead, but it sounds like you have all the bases covered. Is Bob Knight right about you?

RODMAN: They say I'm either a genius or the most stupid, illiterate motherfucker in the world. Some people call it clever. Do you know what I call it? Brilliant. I call it brilliant. Wile E. Coyote, that's me. Wile E. Coyote.

PLAYBOY: And celebrity?

RODMAN: It pays for me and my child.

PLAYBOY: You don't see your daughter much.

RODMAN: Alexis, she's going on nine. She's my role model. She's so beautiful. You know what breaks my heart? Seeing her so shy. All the kids talk behind her back. Even at the private school she goes to, she can't escape being my daughter. We talk on the phone and she says, g"Daddy, I don't want to go to school." It's making me more sheltered. This fucking image of mine—sometimes I can't deal with it. I have two veins keeping me going—my emotion and my little girl.

PLAYBOY: You were a shy kid.

RODMAN: I'm still shy, brother. Watch me with Jay Leno. He'll ask something personal and I'll look down at the ground. I can't look up. I saw Jimi Hendrix on an old Dick Cavett show; he did the same thing. He was shy. Now I see Alexis doing that same look.

PLAYBOY: How often do you see your daughter?

RODMAN: I don't see her. My ex-wife has her. I have a stupid-ass ex-wife writing a book full of bullsnit. We were married only 82 days, but now that I have a little pocket money, she thinks, I'll get rich off his fame. I'm like O.J. Everything I do, people want to make money off it.

PLAYBOY: Do you attempt to see your daughter?

RODMAN: I may have to get lawyers to get me the right to see her. I'd spend all the money it takes. And before I ever have another kid, I want to give my all to Alexis.

PLAYBOY: Do your family problems make you cynical?

RODMAN: No. They make me real. I accept them and go on.

PLAYBOY: What contact do you have with Annie, your ex-wife?

RODMAN: I call her and ask for Alexis.

PLAYBOY: Do you think men and women can learn to get along?

RODMAN: Of course not.

PLAYBOY: Do you want to get married again?

RODMAN: It's hard to go on a scavenger hunt. It's hard to tell who is real and who's only after your money. I had a girl sue me for giving her herpes, which I didn't do.

PLAYBOY: Do you believe in marriage?

RODMAN: I think something happens when you get married. Maybe you made love to your wife before, but it's not the same because now you have to. And you can really make love to the same person only so many times, after that you just go through the motions. You're just fucking. You can make love to a girlfriend. You make love to your girlfriend and your standbys because you don't want to lose them, but you have got to fuck your wife.

PLAYBOY: Last basketball question. Do you have any responsibility to the NBA?

RODMAN: The NBA can kiss my ass. That's their responsibility.

PLAYBOY: Are you misunderstood?

RODMAN: I'm not crazy. I am not Hannibal Lecter. That's the shock of Dennis Rodman if you get to know me—I'm very calm. I am a tidal wave of calm and I'm right here [*pointing to his eyes*], looking at you.

Live with confidence

Linda-Ann Newsome

Instagram **@bikinifit_la**

Photography by Sumner Buck | @memphisglamor
PR Oz Babes Media Group | @ozbabesmediagroup

Could you tell us a bit about yourself? Hi! I am Linda-Ann and go by my initials LA...I'm a sexy and 60 yo model from Florida At a leggy 6'2 might be one of the tallest models here am a former elite athlete and entrepreneur who loves tequila, travel, scuba diving, and adventure 've lived in many places around the world as the spouse of a Veteran have a bikini obsession that motivated me to own and operate a bikini and beachwear boutique where I was introduced to many of the brands now model for You're likely to find me in the gym, on the boat, or at the beach

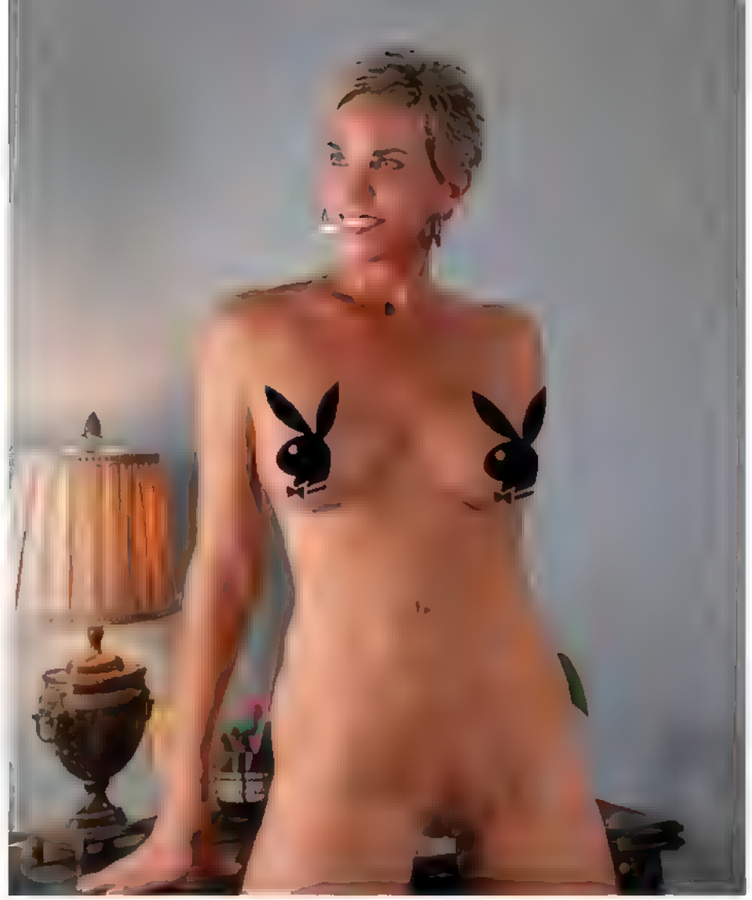
Can you give us a background on your career and where it all started? I began modeling years ago while attending college on a basketball scholarship continued to model part-time while raising my family and running my boutique currently model for my favorite bikini brands, lingerie, and magazines

What's one thing you've learned about yourself? I have earned that age is just a number and with maturity, 've discovered a newly found confidence and sexuality in myself that didn't possess in my 20's and 30's 'm enjoying this chapter of my life and hope that can influence other women my age to embrace their sexy mature selves

What is the biggest misconception people have about you? I am not only a model but I was a former elite athlete, coach, and business owner, wife of an Army Veteran, and a mother of two amazing adult children

Do you have any hidden talents, if so what is it? I learned how to MIG weld and am very good at home repairs, tiling, DIY projects and even helped restore an old JEEP CJ7 later taking it to off-road rallies and races

In what ways do you use your platform to inspire or influence others? I hope to help others adopt a healthy lifestyle with exercise and diet as well as encourage mature women like myself to enjoy their sexy selves often get comments and requests for diet and exercise plans as much as I get asked about what 'm modeling



What message do you hope to convey through your work? Women can be sexy at any age Embrace this time in your life We are the result of all of our life experiences so own them

How do you prepare mentally and physically for a big photoshoot or event? I hit the gym with more intensity as well as focus on my diet also make additional appointments with my aesthetician and hair stylist to look and feel my best for the event

When you're not working, what helps you decompress and relax? I enjoy relaxing poolside, taking the boat to sandbars and islands, and hanging out with friends

What's the strangest fan encounter you've ever had? While on our boat at a local sandbar shooting new bikinis, an online fan recognized me He pulled up in his boat and asked to watch the shoot A few minutes later we invited him on board

If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? Bug spray. .mosquitos LOVE me

What's your go-to guilty pleasure snack? Creamy peanut butter, Good Tequila

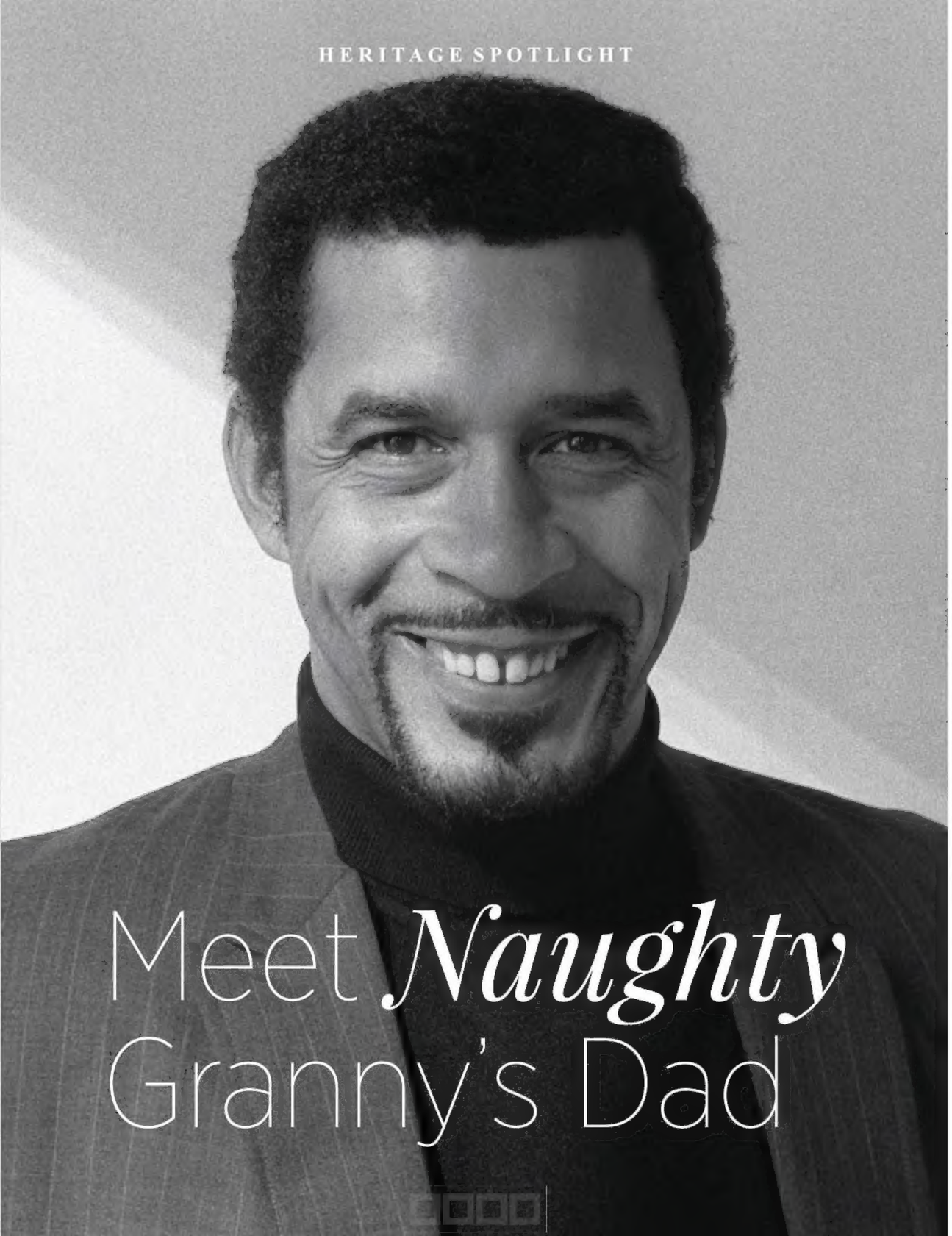
Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words or advice for our readers? It has taken me 60 years to get to this point, and 'm happy to embrace my mature sexy side, live with confidence, and commit to being my best self

classic *cartoons*

"It turns out nobody has anything to say."

"Bah—I just don't know what the youngsters are coming to these days."

"I feel that our fundamental democratic institutions and faith are on trial in the world today. That's why I'm here resting up for the supreme test."



Meet *Naughty* Granny's Dad

Cartoonist Buck Brown took the taboo and made it funny

BY EILEEN GUO

Many PLAYBOY readers know Granny, the unabashedly sexual saggy-breasted cartoon character who relentlessly attempts to seduce men, but far fewer are familiar with the artist who invented her for PLAYBOY'S pages: Robert "Buck" Brown. It's past time to correct that.

Like Granny herself, Brown was, in his own telling, an unlikely candidate for the aspirational world of playboy. Born in 1936 outside Morrison, Tennessee, Brown moved to Chicago as a toddler with his mother and brother, part of the Great Migration of African American families out of the South. His mother worked during the day and, lacking childcare options, sent Brown to accompany his older brothers to school. He was three or four years old when, amazed, he watched a teacher draw a truck on the blackboard.

"To me, he was *making* a truck," Brown (pictured at left) recalled in a 2007 HistoryMakers interview with Larry Crowe. "I wanted to do that too."

After finishing high school and supporting himself with odd jobs, Brown joined the Air Force at the age of 19. Serving for nearly four years, he drew satirical sketches of his unit in his free time; the positive reception helped him "learn the power of the pen." When he received his discharge papers, he returned to Illinois and found work as a bus driver for the Chicago Transit Authority in the late 1950s.

It was along his route that he found the initial inspiration for his Granny character. "A bus is, you'll pardon the pun, the perfect vehicle for a cartoonist," Brown said in a 1981 Playboy collection devoted to his work. "I used to keep a sketchbook and cartoon the situations that would happen on the bus. That's how I learned the art of storytelling." Slice-of-life moments included several in which older women boarded his bus asking innuendo-laden questions such as "Do you go down?" or "Do you go all the way?"

Hoping to get a foothold in the cartooning world, in 1961 Brown sent his first batch of sketches to playboy, expecting rejection; he had already been turned down by *The New Yorker* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. "I wanted to be a cartoonist, but I knew deep down inside I couldn't, so I figured, if I was going to get my stuff rejected, why not get rejected by the best?"

Of the eight options Brown mailed, Hugh Hefner — himself an aspiring cartoonist, albeit in the years before playboy — accepted the eighth, a black-and-white drawing of a boy playing trumpet in the corner, his back to the room; his mother explains to his father, "No, he hasn't been naughty, he's just imitating Miles Davis." The reference to the musician's famous habit of facing away from the audience likely appealed to Hefner, a jazz devotee who would soon print the very first *Playboy Interview* — with Davis as the subject. The cartoon ran in a November 1961 issue of *Show Business Illustrated*, a short-lived title from Hefner's HMH Publishing Co., and Brown's relationship with the Rabbit was off and running: Across 45 years, Brown contributed nearly 600 cartoons to playboy. During his seven years as a bus driver, he was also earning an art degree. "Whenever I needed money, I would sell cartoons at playboy," Brown told HistoryMakers. "I cartooned my way through college." In 1965 he quit his CTA job to focus on art full-time.

By the time his naughty granny made her playboy debut, in 1966, women baring their breasts had long since been the magazine's norm. And yet the appearance of the toothless old woman with the voracious sex drive is noteworthy. This was no young beauty photographed in soft light and airbrushed to perfection; Granny's conventional unattractiveness, and sexual energy in spite of it, was the point.

"A young woman's sexuality is difficult enough to handle," wrote anthropologist Judith Posner in her 1975 paper "Dirty Old Women: Buck Brown's Cartoons." "Perhaps a sexy old woman is so horrendous that it is even difficult to joke about. But finally, somebody has, and [Brown's] humor may well be viewed as an attempt to disparage and push away the fear."

Upending norms and detoxifying off-limit topics turned out to be one of Brown's specialties. Key to this was his deft touch. His jokes weren't always obvious, observed comics critic and historian R.C. Harvey. "Brown's cartoons were often like that: You had to think before you reaped your reward in laughter."

The Granny cartoons are Brown's most popular, but perhaps more incisive are his works that comment on politics and race. Michelle Urry, playboy's longtime cartoon editor (and Brown's commissioning editor), described his takes on the civil rights and protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s as "gentle but sophisticated." Take, for example, his October 1967 cartoon that addresses the segregated housing then common across the country. In it, a group of black adults face a line of white ones on a suburban street; rather than protesting the new arrivals to the neighborhood, the white people smile and hold signs of welcome. Expressions of confusion appear on the black neighbors' faces. The caption reads, "It must be a trap!"

In a 1984 interview with Brown that touched on that cartoon,

Urry compliments Brown's ability to address issues of social justice that others were afraid to go near. "You simply pulled the fangs from it and made everybody laugh at it," she said. How did he manage to do black humor so well, she asked. In the same deadpan style that was a signature of his art, Brown responded, "Well, see, I was raised around black people."

Brown was well aware of whom he was selling his work to: Most of the characters he created for playboy were white, and his pieces relating to civil-rights issues were a fraction of his overall output.

"It probably helped me because PLAYBOY couldn't see my face," Brown told Chicago journalist Ronnie Reese in an interview toward the end of his life. "It was a long time before anyone even knew I was black."

The extent to which Brown's race was obscured is illustrated by a June 1970 *Dear Playboy* letter complaining about Brown's "blatantly racist" March 1970 cartoon, in which "Lil' Willie's" soul-food restaurant is "discovered" by white hipsters. "The black man in America is having a difficult enough time realizing his own prestige and identity, without some Whitey picturing him as a poverty-stricken, ignorant subhuman," an outraged reader wrote. PLAYBOY responded in an editor's note: The reader's "heart may be in the right place, but not his facts: Buck Brown is black; his cartoon satirizes racism."

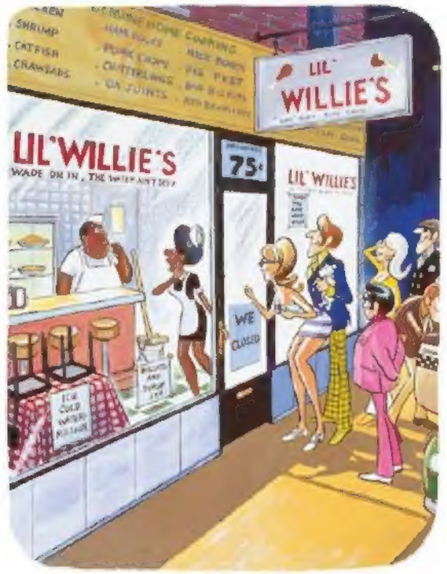
Brown himself was more circumspect. "I kept saying there's no way that a soul brother would see this and not know that a black person did it," he told Urry, pointing to the pains he took to portray the humanity and respectability of the black character — the neighborhood is clean and safe; Willie's restaurant is spotless. In fact, throughout his work, Brown was intentional about how he drew African Americans, if he depicted them at all. "I'll use black people…if I can without them being the butt of it or, you know, if there's a reason for it."

Although it wasn't always apparent to his audience, Brown was a black man in a deeply racist America — and this shaped not only his perspective as an artist but also his take on success. "Coming up at the particular time that I did, you had to be resilient," he explained to Urry. "You had to be able to laugh no matter what, you know? I mean you felt like crying inside but…you always managed to make light of the situation." He felt enclosed by barriers he couldn't break through — "glass ceiling, glass wall, glass floor," as he put it to Crowe. "You're not going to make it as a black Jim Davis or a Charles Schulz."

Brown did, however, thrive where Hefner pivoted: a successful career as a cartoonist, with his work appearing in publications including *The New Yorker, Esquire, Ebony, Jet* and the *Chicago Sun-Times*. As a freelance illustrator and cartoonist, Brown never officially retired, though in his later years his cartoons appeared less frequently in PLAYBOY. In the years before his July 2007 passing, Brown shifted his attention to painting. His cartoons and paintings have sold at auction and are held in private collections, including that of singer Johnny Mathis.

As for Granny, she became a PLAYBOY Centerfold in a 1980 humor piece. She continues to be beloved — and to tirelessly chase after sexual satisfaction. ■

"Then why in hell do they call this a ball park?"



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